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MY CORNISH NEIGHBOURS

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MY CORNISH NEIGHBOURS

BY

MRS HAVELOCK ELLIS

LONDON
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1906

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To

HAVELOCK

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MY CORNISH NEIGHBOURS

TRENWIN

"A DAY lent, sure enough," said Mrs Pengilly. "To see the sky blue like this 'ere and the sea bluer still, and to hear the birds singing, it do almost seem like a welcome to you now you've come to dwell amongst we."

Mrs Pengilly and I were sitting in her old-fashioned farm garden, and as I clasped my hands behind my head and drew the soft air into my lungs, I could say nothing. Mrs Pengilly heard my sigh of relief, and went on :

"We've paid for this weather, my dear, by dampin' and wind for months together, and we shall pay again in season and out for a spell of sunshine like this ; but let us make the best of it before it goes. The hay won't be cut just yet, and I'm ready and willing to help you to get your new house in order. A gran' little place you've chose, sure enough, but it'll need brains and money to make it snug and homely. Lor ! " she continued, as her eyes rested

on a bee settling upon a spray of honeysuckle over her dairy window, "the very birds and insects do knaw a heavenly from a teasy day. Even the slugs do seem to have a bit of heart in them by now, and the late primroses be shabby and shamed, in a manner of speaking, afore the g'eat red roses as be bloomin' just to their time. June month do put even my newly-limed dairy into shade and greyness."

"How glad I am that I am going to live amongst you all!" I said. "From what I have seen in my short visits, the whole place is ideal and the people kind and charming in every way."

Mrs Pengilly's face grew thoughtful.

"There's good and bad and medium here as elsewhere," she said. "A crow don't never turn into a hen, even after it 'ave lived for weeks near our fowl-houses, and we folkses be much the same as our fathers and grandfathers before us. We 'ates new notions, and—" she hesitated, "most strangers too, for our motto be 'one and all,' and we don't lean to no new-fangled ways, even in butter-making and hay-cutting. Butter made wi' a churn isn't nowhere for flavour like that made by the cool hand, and uplong notions don't take hereabouts. A revival at times changes, seemly, the outer ways of some of we, but by lookin' upon my neighbours I've proved that no steadfast good comes of it except by chance now and then."

"Good mornin', missis," said a gentle voice by our sides, and Mrs Pengilly and I turned towards the wall from where the sound came. "Good speed to you, mam," said a man, turning towards

me, "I heard tell as you may be wantin' of a hireling to do your work for you."

"Time enough, Tobias," answered Mrs Pengilly sharply. "The woman ain't had time to take the curl papers out of her hair yet, that is, if she ever makes use of such things. I'll put her on the right people to do her work for her, never fear."

The man smiled as he said :

"No harm done, missis. It's allus better to be a bit forthy than too late."

When he had gone down the lane, Mrs Pengilly turned to me and said in a low voice :

"A poor tool, that ! Don't you never take him on at all. He shuffles his time away, and ponders too much ever to do a good day's work, and besides, his speerit be clean broke, and a man can't rightly build even a rick without a little fervour about him. My son Jacob says many a time that it 'ave hindered him from going courtin' only to think of Tobias."

"How is that ? " I asked.

Mrs Pengilly shook her head as she answered :

"Lor ! I remember he as a bright, high-speerited boy who was that fond o' whistlin' and dancin' that he was known in those days as 'Hornpipe Bill,' his real name being Tobias Penberthy. Neighbours would ask him in and play on a comb or a concertina for him to dance to, 'cause he did it with such a fling, and it would seemly put some of his speerit in they as watched him in those days ; but there," ended Mrs Pengilly with a sigh, "he've never been no man for years."

"Why ? " I asked. "What changed him ? "

Mrs Pengilly stood up and looked over the wall before answering, and then she drew her chair nearer to mine as she spoke.

"Nobody rightly knaws the whole truth of that story, or if there's any truth in it at all; but all of a sudden Tobias hung his head as he walked, gave up drinkin' and dancin' and even smokin', and seemed to have changed places with his down-trodden wife. It don't never do for to listen to hearsay, but it got out as how his missis were most killed wi' strivin' and strugglin' with he night and day. What with his dreamy ways and then his dancin' and drinkin', which seemed not to belong to his laziness in working, she were most beside herself half her time, and his dancin' bouts and drinkin' fits nearly always ended in a good beating for she. He oftentimes bruised her black and blue. Neighbours do say, but I don't see how they can know, that he never really took to she, being daft on Grace Carbines, as is now Grace Olds. Someway he missed Grace, they both being slow in words, and afore he knew where he were, he were caught by his present wife and persuaded into wedlock. She, poor soul, have paid for securing of him, for she were driven crazy wid 'en time enough, and one night she made up her mind to cure 'en once and for all. You see," continued Mrs Pengilly, "there's a lot of women of speerit in this parish, and they holds by one another. Matthew Trevaskis, who has one o' they sort as his wife, says the women here ought to be forced to wear muzzles like dogs and be beaten reg'lar

to keep 'em low. He be allus giving advice to my son Joe about his wife Kezia. But then Jane Ann, Matthew's wife, 'ave allus been a teasy, high-minded woman, the boss of the whole house, though Matthew stanks on she at times. He, poor fellow, lives out o' doors mostly in fine weather, against posts or under gorse bushes smoking, or anywhere to get away from her tonguing. Then there's Martha Hicks. Now she, in a manner of speaking, rules all of we by her sharp, cutting tongue, though she've never been married and is well up in years. Her house be alongside o' yours, and it'll be more comfortable for you if you makes peace wi' she right away at the start, for her tongue be like a pepper dredge when once it's set going. She'm a female of tremenjous speerit, but she've never had no comfortable outlet for it, and that's allus, as you do knaw, a danger wi' our sex. When men and childer can take some of the tonguing it don't 'ave half the malice in it after a while, but Martha have only her nephew Bill Oliver to molest of her near kinsfolk; of course there's her companion, Nancy Curnow, who do mostly get in for the worst of her tantrums, because she does washing wi' Martha. There's enough warlike constitootion in that woman to infect a village."

"Dear me!" I murmured. "What an interesting place to live in! But you forgot to tell me how Tobias Penberthy got his spirit broken, and it interests me."

"Sakes!" cried Mrs Pengilly. "Think of me

never finishing my story. I wander a bit i' speech lately, and I'm sure it is with having so many things to think on. Well, my dear, the story goes—but you can't allus reckon as much on the truth of gossip here as on its flavour, for sometimes it's too black, and now and then there's no truth in it at all; but I'll tell you what is said over this change in Tobias. He had come in one night from the Cat and Whistle (that's our little public here, as you may have noticed) drunk wi' rum, and he were in one of his wild tantrums, and had beat his wife something cruel. The poor woman, so they say, sobbed herself sick, and the g'eat brute fell asleep in his clothes just as he was, and all rolled up in the blankets. His wife be a clean, tidy woman, and the sight of that coward asleep, and unconscious of all she'd endured, froze her blood, and she rose and looked upon Tobias as he lay there snoring like a bull. She told her companion, Jane Ann Trevaskis, who told Martha Hicks, and Martha couldn't keep it from Nancy Curnow, knowing Nancy keeps everything to herself. Even Nancy for once were forced to tell someone, so she confided in my girl Charlotte, and Charlotte was afraid to keep it from me, and that is how I know. Of course I shouldn't tell you except on principle, for it's just to warn you against taking Tobias on for work, for fear his old speerit should ever overpower him again. If it did, he'd never be no use to no-one no-more."

"I quite understand," I said. "But his cure? You have not told me yet. What did his wife do?"

"Lor! I thought I'd finished," replied Mrs Pengilly. "Well, they do say as Blanche Sally, his wife, looked upon that man as he lay there asleep, and it entered her head like a dream to sew him up in the blankets he'd got into so comfortable, and then beat 'en and beat 'en, my dear life! till he cried for mercy. Some might say it was the devil put such a thought in her head, but I hold that guardian angels can push some folkses on to savin' theirselves. She happened to have some packing thread in the house that Tobias had bought for mending a rick-cloth, and she tip-toed downstairs for it and began to sew him up to oncs't. The lazy lout never stirred, and at last she had him tight as a corpse in grave clothes. She got the long-handled cart whip and began to lay on, feeling as safe as safe, for, when he began to move, he grunted, and spit, and cursed awful, but seemly he could not make things out and thought he was in a nightmare, I fancy. She told Jane Ann that at last he roared for mercy, and she stood over him, cowed as he was, and made him swear never to dance nor drink no more, or the same thing would befall him again and again. She also used the biggest threat anyone of we can use to one another; she said, if ever he did any of they things again, she'd tell all the neighbours what a gosling she'd made of him. You see, my dear, being found out is allus more shameful than the actual doin' of anything, and she knew she'd got a hold of him for life. To this day, as far as I do knaw, he've never danced nor drunk once, and his nature

have changed from that of a lion to that of a lamb."

"Poor man!" I said. "I should like to know him."

"Oh! Iss! so you will, sure enough! you'll get to know us all by and by," said Mrs Pengilly. "If I was in the scribblin' line I could write a book on my neighbours, and I needn't be troubled to make up nothin' at all, for it's better nor play-actin' what goes on in this village at times."

"Mother!" shouted Jacob Pengilly from the yard beyond the garden. "Open the off gate for the litter to pass. Matthew Trevaskis do want two more pigs; they've more scald milk than they can make away with."

Mrs Pengilly went to do her son's bidding, and Matthew Trevaskis leaned over the wall and caught sight of me.

"Gran' day," said Matthew.

"Yes," I answered; "it's like heaven."

Matthew grunted as he answered:

"Iss! but a bit overpowering when you're used to dampin', saft weather. It puts my missis abroad more nor anythin', a day like this 'ere, when it comes sudden. It shows up cobwebs and dirt i' the house and fidgets she, because she don't know what to be at first."

"Come and choose," shouted Jacob, and Matthew nodded his head and disappeared from view.

Mrs Pengilly soon joined me, and said with a smile:

"There's nothin' men folkses do love like hagglin'

over the sale of anything. I've known a butcher come here to buy a bullock, and what wi' struttin' and swaggerin', he've kept Jacob most of an afternoon, and then only, as he rounded the corner, managed to say, 'Fine bullock, sure enough!' Now they men," pointing to the yard, "will talk like they say women does, over most everythin' in this village, afore they'll weigh the little porkers and finish. It's pastime to they like coseying over tea be to we."

"Mother, the colt 'ave broke loose and is amongst the new grass, and I can't find Jacob," cried Charlotte from the window above us.

"In the pig's crow, my dear; run to 'en," said Mrs Pengilly. "Lor!" she went on quietly, "I do never bustle over they things now. It's like eatin' a peck o' dirt afore you die: it's got to be. Worry and loss be a sure part in our trade. What wi' milk boilin' over and ruinin' the cream, and sows dyin' and leavin' litters to be brought up by the bottle, and sheep bein' worried by dogs, to say nothin' of rats eatin' most of the profit in tub meat—why! it would never do to let such things prey on your mind, or you'd soon be fit for a 'sylum. The thing to say to yourself is that it'll be all the same in a hundred years."

"I thought farming was the healthiest and pleasantest pastime in the world," I said.

"Pastime!" cried Mrs Pengilly, looking at me out of the corner of her eye. "It's just as much pastime, my dear, as a treadmill. You'll be able to make your observations while you dwell in this

village, and you'll find out that to earn a livelihood by farming ain't done by sucking our thumbs, nor yet by looking on at another's good luck. The world's a rare chancey place, and there's no dependence on nothing," sighed Mrs Pengilly as we entered the little farmhouse.

SALLY'S FOOT

"Good mornin', my dear! Here are your flowers, and I'm tired, sure enough!"

So spoke Nancy Christopher to me one Friday morning when she came, according to custom, to bring me my weekly supply of violets. She had not come the week before, and I asked her how it was, for no weather could stop her if there were any flowers to be got. She shook her old head wearily, leaned against the door heavily, and looked at me as she sighed. I told her to come in and sit down. As she did so she looked up at me fixedly, and then her eyes rested on my feet, to which she pointed with her thin finger.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Lor! my poor Sally!" she said, as she wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Is she worse?" I asked.

"She's some whisht, sure enough!" she said. "The poor crittur is sorely afflicted, for she's failing, and I'm most beside myself to aid her. Last week she says to me: 'Sister,' says she, 'sister, I'm that droopey I don't knaw how to live.' I looked

upon she and it cut me to the heart to see her. 'Sister,' she said, 'I've such sudden qualms nowadays that I'm thinking I shall soon be a-leavin' of 'e, and whatever will 'e do when 'e 've no one to tend?'"

Here Nancy sighed again and straightened out her apron over both her knees, as her eyebrows were uplifted with anxious thought.

"Is she so bad as that?" I asked.

"No, my dear, but she's like a thing whose nerves is all gone. I reckon as the influenza have left the poor dear weak-like in the nerves, for though my old mother was ill for twenty year, her never suffered like my poor chiel."

"What was the matter with your mother?" I asked.

Nancy made the bottom of her apron into a little pucker, and looked at it sorrowfully as she twisted it about in her long fingers.

"Oh! my blessed! her suffered cruel at times. The doctors said as how she had scurvy on her lung, and somethin' wrong wi' her kittneys which formed a sort of bladder round the heart. She was a dear mother, sure enough, and she've said many a time: 'Oh! if God would only let me live just a few years more to take care of my two dear children, how beautiful the world would be!'"

The old woman's eyes had tears in them as she went on.

"But it was not to be, and her died and left we poor old souls to tend one another; and last night we buried up our little bird as we've prized so much,

and we've no one now but ourselves. I said to Sally last night, when I put the poor dear in his bit o' flannel to bury 'en up, I said to she: 'Sister, let us never put our love on nothin' no more. We've suffered over the old cat as we had to drown as if it was a chiel, and now the dear little bird have gone too, and they things is only made for to pass, and we mustn't place our affections on them.'"

Then, looking at me with the weary, patient sorrow of the old and tired wayfarer, she added in a low voice:

"I'm some whisht over the little bird, for to no creature before have I ever failed in my duty, but to he I did. We've been sick and whisht lately, and I've scarce been able to get bread for to eat, and I begrudged the money for the man to come and physic 'en, and he'd a bladder on his poor tail, and they say as the animal's doctor could have cured 'en. Is it foolishness to be so remorseful over a poor dumb thing?"

"No!" I said, "I wish more people felt like you do about the dumb beasts."

She looked relieved, and turned round to see if the door was shut.

"Some folkses," she went on, "do laugh at we, 'cause we've always tended animals as if they was Christians, but seems to me the beasts would oftentimes put the elect to shame, for they do belong to love 'e if you tend 'em and care for 'em."

"But what is the new complaint Sally is suffering from now?" I asked with a smile, for a little peppermint given with minute directions and great

caution had hitherto subdued the dire disease to which she had been a victim for so long a time.

"It's a new complaint, sure enough," she said; "and we was both of a tremble when we found it out. Yes! she's like a thing scared more nor ever over it. 'Nancy,' says she to me, 'sister, my dear, my foot is some swole, and I can't scarcely get my boot on at all; what shall us do?' 'Do,' says I to poor Sally, 'do! why, my chiel, we must see the doctor and tell 'en of it.'"

Nancy put up her hands and shook her head very solemnly.

"Sally's some modest woman, I can tell 'e, and the thought of going to the doctor frightened she more than I can say. Her'd never been in her life, you understand. 'Nancy,' says she, 'I can't for shame go to the doctor.' 'Why?' says I, innocent-like, but I knew all the time. 'My livin',' she said; 'he'll want to see the foot if he's to proscribe for 'en, won't he?'"

Nancy clasped her hands together, and went on solemnly.

"I've never told that woman o' mine a willing lie i' my life afore, but I up and told she one then. 'Sally, my dear,' I said—and God forgive me for it—'doctors is that knowin' nowadays that they can physic 'e for things as they never need to clap eyes on 'e for. Ye've but to tell 'en your foot is swelled, and he'll guess to onc'st what belongs, and he'll give 'e a lotion to cure 'en, and you can go back to your work again.' She brightened at that, my handsome did, and promised

to go. That night says I to she, 'Sally, my dear, there won't be no harm in a-washing of that foot for fear you've got to show it.' 'Oh! sister,' says she, 'you've been a deceivin' of me!' The lump rose i' my throat, for my conscience spoke to me, but the second lie was easier. 'Deceive you!' I said. 'Ain't you my own flesh and blood, and ain't I tended you and cared for you all my life? Deceive you, sister! I'm surprised at you! You're wronging me cruel.' She cried a little and kissed me, and said she must be ill indeed to doubt me."

"Well!" I asked, "and what happened?"

"That night we spread out towels afore the fire, and put blankets over the doors to keep out the draughts, and I got the wash-tray with hot water in it, and a nice soft flannel and some soap, and I led sister to a chair. 'There! my handsome!' I said to she, 'all is ready for 'e!' She looked at me so whisht-like and sat down. 'Sister!' she said, 'it's only February month, and I don't belong to wash my feet till May month is well turned; will it hurt me, do you think?' I was fearing for her myself, but I knew her'd have to do it before the doctor could pass his opinion on her poor swollen foot. 'No, Sally,' said I, very quick-like, for lies was getting easy to me someway, 'it can't hurt 'e at all, for there's some folkses up-long do wash their feet every day.' That cheered her, for she laughed. 'Some folkses is brave and crazy,' she said. Well, we got through the washing like a thing, and I put her to bed and gave she some

hot elders for fear her'd catch cold, and in the morning we went to Dr Wilde. He was some kind, for he saw how nervous poor Sally was. 'Cheer up!' he says so gently to her, rubbing his hands together and smiling at her, 'what's the new complaint?' I answered for her, for her poor old lips trembled so and she seemed totalish. 'It's her foot, sir; it's swelled up somethin' awful.' 'Let me see it,' he said of a suddint-like, and we was both taken on the hop. I looked at Sally, and Sally looked at me. 'Sister!' she said, ready to cry, 'what did 'e say to me? What did 'e promise me?' I got all of a tremble myself, and I says to the doctor: 'Doctor,' says I, 'is it needful to expose her poor foot? She's as shy as a maid through always livin' along o' me and seein' scarce anyone at all, and if 'e could cure she without this we'd be very grateful to you and pay you double if needs be.'"

"What did the doctor say to that?" I asked.

"Well, my dear, he seemed some bad himself, for he turned away and coughed so hard I felt sorry for 'en, and I said to 'en, pitying-like: 'You've some awful cough yourself, sir!' 'Yes,' he said, and he turned his face towards we again, and he was red as red wi' straining, sure enough. Physic ain't much good to he, thinks I, however much he do make use of, but I'd still hopes of him a-curing my poor chiel. 'Come!' he said, quite harsh-like. 'This is all nonsense; of course I must see the foot, or how can I tell what is the matter with it? Get the stocking off while I fetch what I want."

"Oh! my dear life!" went on the old woman, "he went out of the room, and what a job I had with Sally! She'd rather die than do such unbeknown things, and yet what could us do? We was there and we couldn't run away like a thing. 'Sister,' says Sally to me, 'why did us come at all? We was foolish maids not to know this would have to be done!' At last, after begging and beseeching and praying, I got the stocking off the poor foot, and held it in my hand. Such a big foot, wi' most all the ankle buried in the swelling." The old woman stopped a moment and wiped her eyes again.

"Oh!" she said, "the thoughts o' that morning makes me fairly creep all over. The doctor came back and took up the foot to look at it, and my Sally got the palpitations somethin' cruel. I can always tell when her gets they qualms, for she turns so grey and shiverey, and nothin' but a drop of the best brandy does her any good. 'Doctor!' says I, bending down over him as he kneeled by the poor dear, 'doctor! could 'e give sister somethin', for she's very bad, sure enough, and her heart's a failin' of her this very minute?" He looked upon her dear face, and he poured out somethin' into a glass, and Sally drank 'en off, and the life came back into her poor dear eyes. 'How long,' said the doctor, turning to me, 'how long have she been like this?' 'A month and more, sir,' said I. He poked the foot and pressed it, and tried it seemly every way, and then he looked hard at Sally, who at last had got the

nerve to look at 'en. 'This foot is very swelled, said he; 'show me the other one!'"

At this point memory was too much for Nancy; she cried gently into her apron.

"Oh! my dear life!" she went on sadly; "I thought I should have died o' shame, for who would have thought he'd have been so cruel? Besides, what could us do at all? We'd never thought o' washing the other foot, of course, because it was brave and riskey to wash one."

"And what," I asked in a rather tremulous voice, "did Sally say to that?"

"Sally looked at that doctor as I hope I may never see she look at no one again. She pulled on her stocking and tied her shoe, and stood up with more life in her than I've seen for many a month. 'Shame on 'e,' she said to the doctor, 'shame on 'e, I say! I'm sorry I coomed to 'e to be made a by-play of by you as s'ud know better,' and she flung out of the room and the house almost quicker than I could follow her. We both seemed to take a fear over it, and we was both slight for a bit of a while, for if any neighbour should get wind of our insult, think what it would mean to we lone maidens. And this is why I brought 'e no flowers last week."

DOGS

A RAILING on the quay over the quaint harbour of Trenwin is a favourite meeting-place for old pals. I saw the sober salts there one morning soon after my arrival at my new home. The smell of sea-weed invigorated me, and I made my way towards the harbour. Six men eyed me almost simultaneously as I advanced along the quay.

"Can you tell me where Mrs Oliver's yeast-shop is?" I asked. One old salt pointed the stem of his pipe at a pale, blue-eyed man who was leaning against the railing with his feet crossed and apparently in deep thought. He raised his head, and without a word beckoned me to follow him. We entered a narrow street, and at the top of it he pointed to a shop door, which I entered. The man followed me. He evidently belonged to the place, for in a few minutes a stout, calm-eyed woman emerged from the back premises.

"Yeast?" she queried. "How much, please?"

I deposited a penny on the counter, and the woman smiled.

"He," pointing into the little room beyond the shop, "told 'e, did 'e, I were deaf?"

I started. "No," I said, as I shook my head.
"Gran' man, that," she said, as she broke off the yeast, and her heavy face lit up suddenly. "He never fails me 'i nothin'. Might 'ave been a dog, mam."
I looked steadily at Mrs Oliver as she carefully weighed out the yeast. Her low voice, and her quiet, contented manner, prevented any thought of insanity, but what could she mean?
"A dog?" I queried.
"Iss!" she said quietly. "No woman could ever come near a dog for qualities, but I've come across a man at last as does."
The man referred to appeared at the door, glanced at the woman and then at me, and said:
"Weather looks tender to-day, mam, as if it 'ud make rain."
I nodded, and he passed into the street. I took up the yeast and followed him.
"Is—is—the lady who sells the yeast quite well?" I asked him.
He turned his large blue eyes on to my face as he answered:
"Why, surely. Why do you ask such a thing?"
I told him what Mrs Oliver had said to me. A faint smile crossed his face as he sighed.
"That's just the worst of it," he said. "She'll never get that notion out of her head now, and it's no use thinkin' it will ever change."
"But what does it mean?" I asked, genuinely interested.
The man put his hands into his trousers pockets, and stood still as he continued:

"It's like this 'ere. That woman once had a dog. Ever known a female as were overgone on a dog, mam?"

I blushed slightly, for I was fretting after one I had just given away.

"Yes," I answered.

"Well! It's better for 'em to be bewitcht wi' pixies or speerits. When that woman's husband died," jerking his finger in the direction of the little shop, "she were the handmaiden and slave of the dog as he left, and I must say, from all I've heard, he were a knowin' beast."

"You never saw him, then?"

The man looked down at his boots, and took off his cap, and passed his hand through his hair as he answered:

"No; I come to the place the day he'd been buried. She had a little box made for 'en, and later a little stone wi' 'Here lies faithful Jock' put on it, and when I first saw she, she were in the pangs of terrible grief, like mothers be when their first-born die. I've never seen no such thing," he went on. "The woman were fair mazy, crazy. She could talk of nothin' but his ways, his habit of bringin' his cushion to lie his head on, his mad chasing of the crows in the garden, his g'eat brown eyes, and the bushy yellow tail of 'en. I'd been told to go to her house for lodgings, as I'd just come into my sailor's pay, and the doctor said I was wrong i' my lungs, and needed a quiet life and a long rest."

I glanced at the man, and we walked on together.

"I've been there ever since," he went on, in a slightly tired voice; "and it's nigh on ten years now."

"Why! have you been ill all that time?" I asked. He smiled.

"No. I'm well enough to work, but, you see, it's this way. That dog of hers knew as she were deaf, and he were the prop o' the shop, like a thing. When the bell rang he trotted into the kitchen, pulled at her apron with his mouth, and wagged his tail. That meant business for her and a bit o' biscuit for he. He got to know that, like I knows it means a bit o' baccy for me when a customer comes. That dog kept the trade goin' for years, for visitors would come to buy yeast just to see the dog perform like a circus thing. When he died the custom fell off cruel."

"How dreadfully she must miss him!" I said, "for how can she know when the bell rings if she is so deaf, and she has no one else living with her, has she?"

The man was looking steadily at me, and he suddenly tapped my shoulder.

"You look kind, and as if you could understand things. I wonder would you take it amiss if I ask you for a piece of advice?"

"Not at all," I said.

"Well, ye see, it's ten years since I took that dog's place. I took to it natural at first to help she over her trouble, and when the month were up I'd took the rooms for, we'd got used to sittin' by the fire talking about Jock. It were always Jock,

never nothin' else. I seem to know the very wag o' that dog's tail as if I'd had a tail o' my own. It's made me think many a time what a poor way of expressing your feelin's talking is," he continued thoughtfully.

"Quite so," I said.

"She've a painting of Jock," said the man slowly. "It hangs up afore we whenever we eats a morsel, and we never miss looking up and finding some gran' new thing i' that dead dog. She says he had to have some pounds o' best biscuits to keep 'en quiet while some lady lodger got 'en off i' paint, and I allus think that's why he've got such a pitiful look, for no biscuits could have contented a dog of his make and made him glad to sit quiet on his haunches. I sometimes feel I'd give anythin' if he'd walk out of the picter and bite or growl, for he fair makes me nervous sittin' up over we while we're eatin' and talking."

"I should say it would be better to hang the picture in another room," I said, smiling.

"Look 'ere, mam," the man said suddenly. "I ain't half so good as that dumb beast. I begin to feel the need of a change, somehow, and twice I've nearly run off, but somethin' 'ave allus pulled me back, for fear that deaf woman should lose her custom and be scared by hersel'. Her've grown to believe in me like she believes in Jock; I'm pulled in two pieces. One-half of me wants to be a free man again, and the other half wants to stay and help she. Whatever s'all I do at all?"

"Tell her," I said.

"I began onc'st," answered the man, "and she smiled that comfortable, I felt like a man who has thought of a murder and then sudden-like met his victim."

"Why, what did she say?" I asked.

"She made use of words as will never somehow get out o' my head, and I know I'm tied to she all her natural life, in a manner o' speakin'. Not tied like a husband, mind, but like a dog to a chain as he both loves and 'ates. When I told she I were thinkin' of goin' away, she folded her hands and looked right into my eyes and said: 'Jock 'ull never let 'e leave nor forsake me, Jacob Martin. You come to me the day the poor worm were buried up, and he'll see to it, wherever his dear spirit be, by the mercy of God, that ye take his place till I pass too.'"

DRINK

"It's a grand thing to cosey over the fire, my dear," said Martha Hicks to Nancy Curnow, as they toasted their toes in Martha's kitchen.

"A bit o' gossip, so long as it's not too ugly, do never hurt nobody," replied Nancy with a pleasant smile. Then, as she watched the flames dancing round the wood which Martha had pushed into the grate to help the damper in its work of getting up the fire, she continued: "And even if it do be a bit ugly and a body says just what's in her mind about a neighbour, surely it's better out nor in, don't 'e think so?"

She looked into her companion's face and smiled.

"Iss, sure enough," replied Martha. "It do allus do me a power o' good, I know that, to say what I think over some things. I'm just burstin' now wi' wrath over a person's doin's near by. Pity there's winders in some folkses housen, I'm thinking," she added sharply.

Nancy Curnow drew her chair nearer to the fender, put her feet on it, and gently smoothed her apron as she cast her eyes on the floor.

"Nothin' shameful, surely, close by 'ere, my dear?" she asked wistfully. "Two chapels i' the place and a third buildin'! Why, in a manner o' speaking, the whole village ought to be holy ground."

Martha Hicks smiled, and Nancy realised, as she watched her friend's face, that she knew something worth telling, for Martha's smile was harder than most people's sneers. It was a mere contortion of the mouth, a sort of gymnastic of pleasurable feeling. With her lips pressed tightly together and the corners of her mouth drooping, Martha at last snapped out:

"Gosh! the person as I'm thinkin' on do never make no use o' chapels nor yet churches, as I've ever heard tell on. Perhaps that be the reason why things be just as they are."

"Oh!" sighed Nancy, as she said gently: "Perhaps people bean't accountable if they have no religion, for heathens ain't, we're told."

"You've allus a sheep's way o' lookin' at some things, Nancy Curnow," said Martha Hicks severely, "and it's never the way, I tell 'e, to get the full flavour o' sin either for mendin' of it or exposin' of it."

"I didn't mean that at all," said Nancy meekly, looking with admiration into her friend's face. "I were only just wonderin' like."

Martha got up from her chair and stood over Nancy. She tapped her three or four times on the shoulder and said curtly:

"It's a pity as ever any foreigners or uplongs took to come hereabouts to live. Decent folks had

better mind theirselves, for example is very catching, as our minister only told us on Sunday, if you can mind it."

"Iss, sure enough," said Nancy solemnly; "but, after all, strangers do bring we both money and work, for I gets double for my eggs now to what I used to from the neighbours years ago."

"Tut!" said Martha Hicks. "What's that at all, alongside o' 'avin' their whimey ways and upstairt fal-lals to put up wi' all over the place? Their very frills spells backslidin', seems to me. Look at that image up there," jerking her finger towards the wall. "What good 'ave she done 'ere, I should like fur to ask? They say she've given work in the place, but what's that by the side of what she be noted for doin'?"

A sly wink at her friend, as she tapped her sharply with her forefinger on the knee, made Nancy Curnow say gently:

"Perhaps the woman ain't as queer as we do think."

Martha Hicks laughed.

"Perhaps not. If I—" and she drew nearer to Nancy, "if I drank the gallons of fiery stuff as her do swaller year in and year out, I should be a fine lot queerer than her be, sure enough. I tell 'e," she continued in a lower voice, "I do knaw as no one else in this village *can* knaw that that woman livin' there," pointing in the direction of a sombre grey house, "never goes to her bed sober."

"Oh! husht! woman!" said Nancy Curnow, glancing towards the door, "it do never do to say

they things aloud, for it's liable, if it should be heard."

"What a soft sawney thee art!" said Martha, smiling into the gentle face of Nancy. "I've not only heard but I've seen, and seein', as you do knaw, is believin'. I took upon myself to find out if what I'd heard was true, and I stood under that woman's open winder night after night last summer when her and her likes were playin' cards. I counted three pops o' their champagne muck bein' uncorked, and I've heard say as one bottle alone of that do fair maze a body. I tasted a sip onc'st mysel', but I must own I thought ginger pop far preferable. Think of it, my dear, that uplong woman and her chums drinking night after night. When her'd had her fill her'd draw up the blind and she and her friend 'ud stagger acrost the room and close the door, but not before I'd counted the three empty bottles wi' the wire still on 'em, like that champagne stuff do belong to 'ave. No wonder her's queer and touchy and sharp i' the tongue when her do 'appen to be sober."

Nancy Curnow sighed. The evidence certainly was strong against the woman who had more than once cheered her lonely life, and she was wondering if nothing could be done to show the poor stranger the evil of her ways, when Martha Hicks continued slowly:

"That ain't the worst neither. It ain't only o' nights that her do drink so bad, but her do take strong speerits in the arternoon, most every day. Jim Richards told me as how one day he went

into she for to be paid for some timber as he'd brought, and he almost fell in a 'eap at the sight o' she, he bein' a decent man and only havin' 'ad dealin's wi' proper females in his time."

"Lor!" exclaimed Nancy Curnow suddenly, almost blushing at what she might hear, "whatever did 'e see, at all?"

"Believe me now, will 'e?" queried Martha Hicks in a shrill interrogative. "He saw she," she said slowly, "a married woman, and up in years too, drinkin' strong brandy and water wi' lemon and sugar in it at four o'clock in the arternoon!"

Nancy Curnow nearly fell off her chair.

"It were enough to scare him, sure enough. Whatever did he do?"

"Do! what could he do?"

"Well, I think," said Nancy Curnow slowly, "that if I'd been a leader as he be, I'd have reprimanded she for her soul's sake."

"He'd no time to speak even," almost screamed Martha, as she went on breathlessly. "The brazen hussey up and put forth her hand to ring the bell, and said to 'en: 'Have some tea wi' me, Mr Richards. Do you like it strong or weak? This is the way I allus take it,' and the minx pointed to the steamin' grog. These were the very words from she to he, and then from he to me," emphatically continued Martha, as she stooped to pull up a stocking which had fallen down over her boot. "I'm almost certain," she went on, "that he said she winked at 'en as she said it. Listen! don't interrupt me," as Nancy was going to protest, "let

me tell 'e all. 'Tea, mam,' says Richards to she, and he said he spoke very stern. 'I don't belong to take tea in no such fashion as that,' and he pointed to the stuff as she were guzzlin' down as fast as she could. 'I drinks my tea wi' milk, mam,' says he. What do you think her had the imperence to say then, thinkin' o' course he were a fool and knew nothin'?"

"I cain't think," said Nancy.

"'This is Roosian tea, Richards,' she said. Pisht!" went on Martha, as she wrathfully poked the fire, "I fair 'ates the very name o' that woman for tryin' to gull we as she do. I only wish I'd 'ad the chancs't myself of answerin' her pert sayin's."

"Thee'll break the slab, my handsome, if thee beats it like that," said Nancy.

"Thee'rt a g'eat soft," said Martha Hicks more quietly. "Thee's no speerit whatever. I'm almost thinkin' some of that woman's champagne stuff and brandy 'ud do thee good."

"I feels sadly over it all," said Nancy feebly. "It seems to me that no female could really be so bad as what you do say. It ain't in our constitootions, somehow; it sounds more like what men folkses does at times."

Martha Hicks took down her hat from a nail close by. It was a hat that seemed to have taken some of the characteristics of its owner to itself. It was black. It was severe, and, moreover, turned down with so sharp a curve that you felt the brim would never expose to a vulgar gaze the face of the woman underneath. It had withstood gales and

rain and fashions for many years, and to Martha Hicks's eyes it was as fresh as ever. Nancy Curnow watched her friend tie the strings of her hat under her chin, and as she patted the bow, she turned to Nancy and said imperatively :

"Get up, and I'll prove to thee what nothin' but thy own eyesight can tell thee."

"Where be you going to take me?" said Nancy, as she reluctantly got up.

"To prove my words to 'e, silly," she answered. As she led her friend out of the back door she said slowly : "Her garden," pointing to the house close by, "bein' so nigh mine, I'm specially priveleged, as you can understand."

Nancy Curnow nodded, and Martha continued :

"Well, her farm man do never go further than he need, even wi' empty bottles, and if you ain't worse nor Thomas i' the Scriptures, you'll perhaps own as when a neighbour do tell 'e a truth it ain't no lie."

With this dogmatic assertion she almost pulled her friend to the wall at the end of the garden. She dragged an old box towards Nancy Curnow and told her to stand on it. The two women clung together on the narrow wood.

"Look well, my dear," said Martha Hicks with a smile, and the corners of her mouth drooped more than ever. "I'll be forced to bring glasses for 'e to see the show with, I'm thinkin'. There!" with a poke in the ribs of gentle Nancy. "What's them, do 'e think?"

"Bottles," answered Nancy in a whisper.

"How many?" asked Martha, grinning. "Count 'em, do."

"I cain't at all," said Nancy under her breath; "it's dozens and dozens, sure enough."

"So 'tis, my handsome," said Martha triumphantly.

"All champagne, I tell 'e," she went on.

"Oh! dearey me!" from Nancy, "I wonder the woman ain't dead and buried."

"Pity but what she was," Martha said.

"Poor thing, poor thing!" said Nancy.

"Hold your noise!" said Martha. "Nobody's poor but they as deserves it." She spoke absently. She had pushed her hat on to the back of her head, and she was gazing intently at the large pile of empty bottles. They had been piled tier on tier in order to take up as little space as possible. "See!" cried Martha suddenly. "Things is worse than I thought. Gosh!" she went on solemnly, "the wires is there and all; but, my dear,"—drawing the terrified Nancy closer to the wall for fear they should both fall from the narrow box—"hold on hard, and don't 'e slip. Tell me if you do see anything."

"No, nothin' but bottles wi' red and white labels, leastways they on the top have. Whatever do 'e see at all?" asked Nancy, pale and trembling. "Whatever have 'e found, woman?"

"Why, this," said Martha, trying to look shocked, but pointing a triumphant finger at one of the bottles. "See!" she went on breathlessly. "It's worse nor champagne: it is some foreign speerit after all, perhaps Roosian, as her told Jim Richards."

The two women almost fell over the wall in their excitement. The bottle Martha pointed out had its terrible evidence in red and white before their eyes.

"Read what's put there," said Nancy.

"I cain't," said Martha; "but I'll spell 'en out, and mind you remember." In a low voice she spelt out the long and evil word, S-a-l-u-t-a-r-i-s.

"Oh! dear, dear!" cried Nancy, "it do almost make you think o' hell fire." And the solemn face of Martha, as she strode back to the house, made Nancy clasp her little thin hands together, as if in prayer for so great a sinner as the woman in the grey house.

A MEEK HUSBAND

Jane Ann Trevaskis peeped into the doorway of her neighbour and great friend, Blanche Sally Penberthy. She heard no sound, so she tiptoed into the clean kitchen and looked round. Her friend's head suddenly emerged from her little dairy, and the two women looked eagerly at one another.

"Where is he, then?" asked Jane Ann Trevaskis.

Blanche Sally merely pointed in a resigned way to the ceiling.

"Lor!" cried Jane Ann.

"You may well!" answered Blanche Sally.

"In bed be 'e?" asked Jane Ann.

"Iss! I've locked up the clothes from 'en," said Blanche Sally.

Jane Ann giggled.

"Serve 'en right," she murmured. "I like to know a man be stanked on, for they'm miserable torments most o' their time."

Blanche Sally smiled as she folded her arms and leaned against the table. Then she said:

"He don't get no upper hand wi' me no more, my

dear. Men i' their place be well enough, and especially as standbys i' dark nights, but when they comes to lord it too much over we and play hide and seek, in a manner of speaking, from their lawful wives, it's time to be movin'. I've conquered 'en afore and I'll do it again."

Blanche Sally saw the look of admiration in her friend's face as she leaned against the settle, crossed her feet and folded her arms. Blanche Sally pointed to a chair with a smile, and Jane Ann drew it to her with a sigh of contentment, as she murmured: "It fair took my breath away when Matthew told me last night how Tobias were caught unawares. Matthew allus holds by men bein' masters, so I couldn't quite get at the rights of it all from he, and besides, Joe Pengilly were in our house, and Matthew allus has a notion that he's not real master over Kezia, and so he wouldn't say much. Nothin' torments the varmints more nor havin' to face the real downfall of another man through a woman, and a wife worst of all. So I'm really not accquainted wi' any real facts," ended Jane Ann plaintively.

Blanche Sally smiled grimly as she said:

"I thought you'd be took back like all the rest."

"Tell us, do!" said Jane Ann wistfully. She planted her elbows on the table, and held her cheeks firmly in her hands as she looked at her friend.

Blanche Sally glanced towards the door, closed it gently, peered up the stairs, and then pulled her companion into the little dairy.

"He cain't hear nothin' 'ere," she said.

The two women half sat and half leaned on the big slate table, which held the bright pans of scalded milk.

"I were allus against you marryin' at all, Blanche Sally," said Jane Ann.

"Hold thy noise, do, woman," retorted Blanche Sally. "When the pork be roastin' i' the oven it's too late to say don't kill the pig."

"All the same, it's true," muttered Jane Ann. "Thee ought to have married a ginger-bread man, and when thee was tired of 'en thee could eat 'en."

"I've done worse to 'en than eat 'en, this bout," said Blanche Sally.

Jane Ann laughed as she said :

"I commend 'e, whatever it be. They meek men be allus the worst when the fit be on 'em," she continued. "I've allus had grave doubts over Job's piety. He seemed meek, sure enough, when he were sittin' on a dung-pile scrapin' of his sores, but as far as I do knaw there's not a word i' the Bible to tell we what they three females as were his daughters had to go through at times. The meekest is often the forthiest when they let go. I should say, myself, that if only we'd the record from Karenhappach and the other two, we might 'ave lost the meek man out of the Scriptures altogether. A dove of a man on a dung-pile might well be a roarin' lion in his own house."

"Matthew 'ave taught thee a sackful o' wisdom," said Blanche Sally slowly. "I ain't learnt all that out o' poor Tobias, sure enough."

"Haven't I brothers and a father?" retorted Jane

Ann. "Husbands ain't everythin', I'd leave you knaw."

"They's the most heart-rendin' anyway," said Blanche Sally with a sigh.

"Be he sick?" asked Jane Ann.

"Giddy! I should say," answered Blanche Sally.

"Do tell us!" implored Jane Ann.

"'Tain't much to tell," said Blanche Sally modestly. "I sent that g'eat laggard," pointing to the ceiling, "to sell butter and eggs as I do belong Fridays, and he were some late comin' 'ome and I got fidgety for fear he'd dropped the eggs or somethin'. I were lookin' out of the door when I see your Joe, and I asked 'en if he'd seen Tobias anywhere, and he up and grinned at me from one ear to another. 'Lor!' says I to he, 'what's caught thy fancy now?' 'Thy man,' says he. 'Darn thee!' says I, all of a shake, 'wherever be he at all?' 'In the Cat and Whistle dancin' his boots off of his feet,' he said.

Blanche Sally wiped her brow with the corner of her apron, and Jane Ann cried:

"Of course it were only a boy's make believe."

"I off with this 'ere," replied Blanche Sally, touching her apron, "and on with my hat, and away I went for my life, and sure enough there he were. I slipped in very quiet and watched 'en a bit afore anybody spied me. There were Tobias, if you please, in the big parlour at the Cat and Whistle, dancin' like mad, his g'eat red nose up i' the air, and his feet and legs flyin' like a devil in a gale o' wind. I were mazed to look upon him,

for I've never seen Tobias wi' the heart of a louse in him since I conquered he afore. I couldn't move nor speak for a bit, for I felt I could 'ave killed 'en there and then. Sparks flew out of his boots, his feet went so fast, and all the men cheered 'en fit to kill theirselves. It seemed to send the varmint mad like a colt let loose i' the field. His coat tails flew, my dear, as if they was alive, his collar come undone and the tie after it, and what else would 'ave gone heaven only knows, if I hadn't hollered upon he as I've never hollered in my life afore."

Blanche Sally stopped for breath.

"Whatever did you say at all?" gasped Jane Ann.

"'Tobias' was the one and only word I made use of to bring that crazy man to his senses," said Blanche Sally fiercely. "It stopped his dancin' as if it had been a bullet in the chest of 'en. I picked up his collar and tie and then I looked at 'en. The jig had gone clean out o' his legs, to say nothin' of his eyes. He seemed daft wi' terror."

"Whatever did the company do?" asked Jane Ann.

"I don't knaw and I don't care," said Blanche Sally. "I never took no notice o' they; they might have been worms for me. I dragged Tobias into the street, and all I could bring myself to say to he from there to here were 'Walk i' front o' me.' I were too mad to say another word."

Blanche Sally sighed deeply as she continued:

"There be only one bit o' comfort i' all the set out," she said more gently. "If it had been a

Saturday he'd 'ave had on his best boots, and it would have worn 'em fair down, for he've had those Sunday boots of his nearly nine year come Michaelmas, and they've never been tapped yet, for I never lets him put them on except on Saturdays to go to town wi' me to do the shopping. You see," she added thoughtfully, "if you've ever noticed, he do lift his feet ginger, most like a rooster i' wet grass. I taught him that years ago to save the shoe leather."

"Grand notion, sure enough," said Jane Ann. "I never thought o' that afore, and yet I've wondered at the way he've picked his road to town, most like a turkey pullet in a field, as you do say."

A call from upstairs roused both the women.

"Blanche Sally!" said the voice, "I cain't stay in the bed no longer."

"Let 'en call," said Blanche Sally severely. "Let 'en rest the legs of 'en, I say. His clothes be locked up, and so are his boots, and bed and sops for two days will 'appen cool the hot blood of 'en, and I'll take good care he do never have no fling again so long as he's a livin' husband to me."

THE HUNGRY BOY

Jane Ann Trevaskis was in a bad temper. News had come in the morning that her nephew must go home to his mother. Jane Ann threw the saffron recklessly into the buns she was making and bit her lip. The boy was useful to her now. She had taken him from her ne'er-do-well sister in order to help her along, taught him all he knew, and now, just as he was worth his keep, he was sent for to work for his parents.

"Darn the fules!" the woman muttered as she put the dough on to the tin ready for the oven. She turned sharply, for Joe, the boy she was thinking about, stood behind her. His round, good-tempered face increased the bitterness of her spirit. His mouth, already in shape for that perpetual whistle of his, made her feel inclined to box his ears, as though he were the culprit.

"Stop that!" she said snappily. "Don't whistle in the house. You'm worse than a cuckoo for allus doin' of the same thing."

The boy took his hands out of his pockets and sat down in his usual seat in the corner of the settle.

Joe watched his aunt put the cakes into the oven, and he nearly whistled again for pure joy at the sight of them. He was a very healthy, happy boy, and had no painful thoughts but one—the fear lest he should ever be made to go home and be badly beaten by his people again. The thought of that sobered him at once, and his aunt used it as a threat whenever she was in a "tantrum." Jane Ann banged the oven-door and faced her nephew.

"Why doesn't thee speak?" she asked. "What's happened to thee?"

He laughed.

"I wants my dinner," he said.

This opened the floodgates of her wrath.

"Dinner, indeed!" she shouted at him. "Here it is, and it's about the last thee'll get here, my son." She put a large basin of broth on the table, and gave him a spoon, shining like a silver one, for Jane Ann Trevaskis was famed for being "as clean as gold." Then she poured out more of the savoury soup into another basin for her husband, and filled a large cup for herself, and then sat down. As she did so she glanced towards the door, for her husband was late. "Men's devils!" she muttered. "Allus too forthy or too late. Eat your broth and don't stare," she hissed at the boy, who was slowly blowing into his huge spoonful of broth, while his eyes were fixed on the angry face of his aunt.

Matthew Trevaskis came in at this moment, and wiped his hands, which he had just washed outside, on the roller behind the door. He winked at the

boy as he did so; he guessed there was a storm brewing. He sat down, pulled his chair well in, for fear of making crumbs, and "supped" his broth. For a time nothing was heard in the kitchen but the blowing and drinking of the three. At last Matthew spoke.

"I wants Joey to help me ring they pigs to-morrow," he said.

Jane Ann felt her moment had come. In spite of her grief at having to lose the boy, she felt that sort of thrill she had only known at funerals, sudden deaths, and great revivals. She knew her husband loved the boy even more than she did, and she knew she was going to give him "a turn," as she expressed it.

"Joe," she said sedately, "won't be 'ere to-morrow, nor no more at all!"

There was a sudden lull in the blowing and drinking, and the very leeks in the bowls seemed to stand on end to listen. The man and the boy looked at one another, and then at the woman, who was smiling calmly, but with indrawn lips.

"Darn it!" said the man, "who says he won't be here?"

"His mother and father," said Jane Ann.

"Gosh!" said the boy, who looked suddenly as if all the whistle and life had gone out of him.

"They can't take 'en at all!" said Matthew.

"He be only thirteen," said Jane Ann, "and his mother ain't no more heart nor a louse, and as for his father—" here Jane Ann stopped for breath, and then said bitterly—"as for he—my lor! if

you was to scrape hell with a fine toothcomb you'd never find his like no more."

The boy was suddenly sobbing like a girl, and the woman went to the oven to look at her buns, in order to hide the "soft feeling" she felt for them all.

Matthew pushed his bowl of soup aside. "I can't touch no more," he said, and fumbled for his pipe. Then, as he smoked, with his legs stretched straight out and his arms folded, he began to think. A long time went by.

"Get the lad ready to onc'st," Matthew said at last to his wife.

"Thee g'eat fule," answered Jane Ann. "What fur?"

"'Cause I tells thee," he said stolidly.

"Look!" she said, pointing to the boy, "he's crying a stream, and I'm 'shamed to pester him to-day."

"Do as I tell thee," he said sternly, "and leave the rest to me. Send nothin' home wid 'en but what he stands up in, and I'll bet he'll be back here in less than a week."

The boy took his hands from his face and looked at his uncle.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Get up to onc'st," he said, "and I'll take thee to the next train, and gie thee a bit o' good sound advice on the road."

In less than half an hour the woman saw them both down the lane, and she waved a handkerchief to them for luck, and shouted to them as they

turned the corner, "Mind yourselves now!" Jane Ann Trevaskis went back to the house and soaked her head in vinegar, and the saffron buns were forgotten and burnt in the oven. When the husband and wife sat down to their lonely tea that night the woman said to the man: "What did 'e tell Joe to say to his people?" He smiled a little sadly, but all he answered was, "Wait and see."

They did see, for in five days Joe, with a very red face from having run all the way from the station, bounded into the kitchen while his uncle and aunt were having their tea. He sat down in his own corner in the settle, and beat his fists on the table, while he stamped a jig on the floor with his feet. His aunt laughed, his uncle smiled and scratched his head, and the tom-cat rubbed itself against each one in turn and purred loudly.

"However did 'e compass it, Joe?" at last his aunt asked.

The boy put his hand into his breast-pocket and brought out a letter.

"It was all along o' 'e," he said, pointing to his uncle.

The letter ran:—

"Dear Sister Jane Ann I ope this finds you well as it does we at preasant you can keep Joe for he is like a fair stairved boolack for eatin and he ave never done nothin sin he come ome but sit down on his tale end and eat we out of the place we thort one time he must burst but he is ere still so we send

him back with our best love and hopin this will find you well and arty for it is real kind of you to keep Joe for he must be costin of you a fair fortin in butchier's mate alone to say nothin of shoe lether I ope you can rede this for it ave took me the best part of the day to rite it but the boy is waitin to go to the train from Sister Sue."

OLD CHINA

Widow Trevaskis was very happy as she gently dusted her chairs in her little kitchen. She had prayed "fervently," as she told her niece, that a piece of good luck might come to her, and it had come. A long period of sickness, followed by many losses, had aged her during the last six months. As she dusted her chairs she wiped away a tear which had come into her eye, partly in remembrance of her bad luck, and partly in gratitude for the good luck of to-day. She turned suddenly, for Jane Ann Trevaskis, her daughter-in-law, stood in the doorway.

"Come in!" said Widow Trevaskis.

"I can't stay for to stop," said Jane Ann.

"Oh! a minute, do," pleaded the old woman. "I'm all of a tremble, somehow; the luck's turned at last, my dear," she said.

Jane Ann looked sharply at her mother-in-law. "Time too," she said. "But how?"

The old woman blew her nose and sat down with a sigh in the rocking-chair near the fire. "I don't believe as I'm ill-whist at all," she said.

"Iss! you be, and I could lay my finger on the person as does it," said Jane Ann. "Thee's fair bewitcht," she added.

"It did look like it one time," said Widow Trevaskis.

"I must own that, to be sure, but I'm pullin' thro', my dear. If I could get rid of this chronic in my windpipe, as the influenzie have left me, I s'ud stand a chance again," and she rubbed her thin old neck slowly with her left hand, while she wiped her eyes with her right.

"Influenzie ain't the worst, at all," said Jane Ann. "Want o' ready means be a lot more prostratin', in a manner o' speakin', than illness. Any person down wi' that complaint do need to fortify the system, same as if they'd a low fever, and gruel ain't no standby at all, neither for one whisht thing nor the other." Jane Ann pulled down her apron and smoothed out the creases in it as she spoke, and her brow was puckered with thought.

"I've a dew on my tongue every mornin' since I took ill," said the old woman wearily.

"Med'cine's the thing for that," said Jane Ann.

"Too costly, my dear," said Widow Trevaskis, as she shook her old head.

"What about this luck, whatever it be?" said Jane Ann roughly; "happen it 'ull pay that for 'e. What be it at all?"

Widow Trevaskis put her hand into her pocket, drew out a handkerchief very slowly and carefully, untied a tight knot in the corner, and brought out half-a-sovereign. She placed it on the table, so that they could both gaze at it. Jane Ann

glanced quickly at her mother-in-law, and in a subdued voice she said, "My blessed!"

The old woman clasped her hands in her lap and smiled fondly at the half-sovereign. Jane Ann picked it up, and the smile slowly left the elder woman's face. "Leave 'en be," she said anxiously. For answer Jane Ann spat upon the gold piece and replaced it on the table. "That'll double it," she said.

The old woman rocked backwards and forwards, her hands still crossed and her small feet, in their coarse blue stockings and bright shoes, dangling. "I'm fair mazed," she said happily. "I won't break into 'en to-day for a world. I'll sleep wid 'en under my pillow for one night."

"How did 'e come by 'en?" asked Jane Ann.

"Prayer," said Widow Trevaskis.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Jane Ann.

"Iss! sure enough," carolled the happy dame.

The younger woman grew impatient, and she said sharply:

"They days be gone by for miracle work. Tell the rights o' it, for I must be going."

"Well!" said Widow Trevaskis, smiling happily at the recollection, "I were sittin' 'ere this mornin', 'avin' prayed with the faith of a grain o' mustard seed, or else it ain't no manner o' use expectin' a reasonable answer, when a tap come to the door, and that g'eat curly-pated artist chap, as took off Harriet Jane a while sin', were standin' there. I asked 'en in, of course, and he looked very took back somehow, as if he'd come against his will, so

I says to 'e, 'Sit 'e down, won't you, sir?' He fumbled about and shuffled his feet and coughed a lot, and I couldn't make it up, and he kep' lookin' at the potshelf yonder, and his eyes seemed that restless, I nearly took a fear. 'Is anything amiss over there, sir?' I made bold fur to ask 'en at last, for I were all of a shake. Then he seemed to let 'isel' go all o' a sudden. 'Mrs Trevaskis,' he said, quick-like, as if he were most 'shamed o' 'isel', 'will you sell me they two old cups and saucers what belonged to your grandmother?' and he plumped down this half-sovereign.

The old woman stopped for breath, and Jane Ann looked hard at the potshelf.

"'It's the hand of the Lord,' I said quick to myself," the old woman continued. "I almost shouted with the feelin' o' thankfulness as come over me."

Jane Ann was a little puzzled. "They artises seems to me not exactly 'alf their time," she said. "Whatever use could he make o' that flashy bit o' china?"

Widow Trevaskis was irritated. "You'm a gross woman, Jane Ann," she said; "you do never see a dispensation anywhere. It were so clearly the hand o' the Lord that I felt no call to tell 'en even that the cups was never in our family at all. Thanks be, I only gave threepence each for them last Feast Monday when that cheap Jack came round wi' his van. How little I knew then that they was to be the means of bringing about a sudden answer to prayer!"

JUSTICE

Caroline Ann Stevens sat in her small kitchen and thought over the events of the morning. She was not accustomed to reflection, and her brow was puckered with the effort. She would have given a fortune, had she had one, to undo her action of an hour ago, but as it could not be, she was suffering more than she would ever have confessed to anyone. A sombre peace reigned in the little whitewashed square which enclosed her cottage and three others. The gossip and excitement of the early morning had subsided, and the neighbours sat in twos and threes in their homes discussing whether any of them would be required to give evidence, if it was really true that the police had been sent for. In the next cottage sat Mrs Treglisson, whose "soul had been torn out of the top of her head," as Wilmot Tregarth expressed it, and with a grim smile on her face, which ill accorded with her two black eyes and the white cloth round her forehead.

As Caroline Ann meditated, she heard a knock on her door. She was a brave woman, but she

shivered slightly as she said "Come in." It was Police-Constable Uren.

Caroline Ann looked up at him quickly, and he coughed as he put his hand in a determined way on the table.

"Whatever do 'e want 'ere?" the woman asked.

"You," replied Constable Uren.

"Sakes!" said Caroline Ann. "Whatever fur?"

"To inquire," said the policeman, in a formal way, for he could hear people shuffling round the door, "into the reason why Mrs Treglisson have been furiously assaulted by you."

Caroline Ann had finished her thinking, and the relief was gradually appearing in her face. She was essentially a woman of action. In the five years she had lived out in the West, in America, she had been called "The Amazon" because of her strength of character and almost masculine courage. Even in this little village few people cared to provoke her, as it was rumoured that she still kept a pistol hidden in her bosom, as she did in the wilds of America. Police-Constable Uren knew Caroline Ann well by report, and he did not mean to be conciliated. So when she dusted a chair and offered it to him, he said sternly: "No, thank you. I can hear better standing." This seemed to upset Caroline Ann. She had a dim feeling that if she could stand over him as she talked, she could cow him; but he stood before her as straight as a ramrod.

"What 'ave you to say for yourself?" said he, for he heard a suppressed cough outside.

Caroline Ann folded her arms in a determined way, strode out into the middle of the room, and stood in a fighting attitude with her feet apart as she asked: "Do you 'appen to know the beastly toad as is at the bottom of all this?"

"Iss!" answered the constable, relapsing into his native tongue; "she be a relation o' mine."

"Oh!" said Caroline Ann, "then it's well for her as there be a policeman in the fam'ly, for maybe he can give she a hint or two. She's a real varmint, I can tell 'e, and no mistake."

"Stop that!" said Constable Uren severely, as an answer to a giggle at the door as well as to the woman before him. "You're only making matters worse for yourself in Court by and by. What I'm here for is to know why you assaulted the woman."

"For the reason I gave you," answered Caroline Ann sullenly. "She's a real she-devil, and enough to upset a world, to say nuthin' of a village."

Police-Constable Uren rapped hard on the table, for he heard a titter outside, and he knew that half the village was there by now. It was time to be getting to facts. A woman outside muttered, "She've got he there, sure enough," and so put him on his mettle.

"Tell your story, Mrs Stevens," he said sternly, "without calumny." He almost heard the "oh!" of wonder and admiration outside.

He had not been in the force very long, and he was glad to have a little practice in dealing with offenders.

"My story be short enough," answered Caroline

Ann placidly. "She and me be neighbours, and I keep a few head of poultry, and once or twice the pullets have wandered into her garden. Fowls ain't Christians," she said appealingly, as she looked up into the constable's face. "They don't know nothin' about the rights o' property. How should they? A blade o' grass in one place is like a blade o' grass in another to they. Well," she went on, in a weary voice, "she worried and worried over they hens going into her garden till her husband told mine as he believed she'd take ill over it. But she didn't. She threw a stone one day and lamed my best rooster instead." Caroline Ann stamped her foot savagely as she said this, and the constable, listening intently, took out a little note-book and pencil.

"Well," he asked, "what more?"

"'Tain't much to tell, anyway," she continued. "I bound up the poor worm, and he've never had the same crow in him since. It took the heart out of him to be seen limpin' round with his leg in a bit of cotton like that. Well, that were only one of the wilful bad things as she did against me," unfolding her arms and pointing savagely in the direction of the other cottage. She frowned as she continued: "Then, one day, her poured boilin' water on my best layin' hen's back, and made her screech so she terrified the other hens, and I'd no eggs that day at all."

The woman wiped her hot face with her apron, and the policeman held his pencil in the air.

"But all this was no reason for the furious assault

of this morning," said Constable Uren, in his best manner, and there was a murmur of applause outside, and a few faces peeped in the door.

"Look 'ere," said Caroline Ann, as she edged up closely to the constable, and stood with her arms akimbo and her eyes flashing, "listen to me. If you're a man as well as a bobby, you do knaw well enough that oftentimes, when a man stanks on a woman and nearly kills she, it's no worse in the eyes of Him above than her continual naggin' of 'e, for nothin', for thirty days i' every month. Everythin' turns at times as well as a worm, whose nature it is to turn anyway. It relieves the bile to scream, and stank, and swear, if a body's too hard pressed. The very mountains, in foreign parts, does it when they cain't hold theirselves in no more. I bore that woman's gibes, and jeers, and whimey ways, to say nothin' of her wilful malice over my hens, till every drop o' blood in my body seemed turned to gall. She 'ave done all the unneighbourly tricks you can reckon up, and tried to make me the talk of the place; but I've never so much as threatened she wi' this"—and Caroline Ann took the famous revolver out of her breast.

Police-Constable Uren put his book and his pencil into his pocket.

"Nasty plaything, that!" he said, in a low voice.

She still held it towards him, and smiled grimly as she continued fiercely:

"The next time I'll scare she, sure enough. I was too angry to think of it this mornin'; but," with a sudden look at the rather white face before

her, "I've never told you why I flew at she at the last!"

"No!" said Police-Constable Uren gently; "please do."

The throng outside could not hear his voice, and pressed further into the room.

"Because," said Caroline Ann, "because that varmint could think of nothin' else to do to revenge herself on me and my poor fowls, she up and did just the one thing that fair maddened me, and made me more like a devil than a woman."

Police-Constable Uren was listening intently.

"Whatever was it?" he asked.

"Well, it was just that what finished me. She took her door-mat," Caroline Ann continued, "fairly smothered it wi' pepper—black pepper, mind you—and beat it as if she'd limb the post as is between our houses, and she knew, well enough, that I was cutting up scraps for the fowls on the other side. Before I could turn to go in I were blinded wi' pepper, and I gave forth a scream with the pain, and she laughed fit to kill herself."

Caroline Ann was gasping for breath. She held the pistol towards the constable, and shouted until the multitude outside held their breaths too, and the greater number backed into the street, for they saw bloodshed ahead.

"Dirty jade!" went on Caroline Ann breathlessly. "I can see she now. I thought no more, but I went for she like this," and she flew, with rage and madness in her face, towards the man before her. He turned swiftly, and shut and

locked the door quickly upon the excited crowd. Then he advanced towards the infuriated woman.

"Husht!" he said soothingly, as if he were speaking to a naughty child. "Listen to me," and he put his hands on her arms, so that the pistol was turned downwards. "I'll just go to onc'st—" and he glanced towards the door as he whispered the rest of the sentence—"I'll just go to onc'st if you'll leave me be, and put that firearm in hiding again, and I'll have a warrant took out against she"— jerking his head towards the wall—"for assaultin' of you with the pepper-mat."

A little colour crept back into the policeman's lips as he saw the look of triumph in the face of "The Amazon."

BILL OLIVER'S BOOTS

Martha Hicks and Nancy Curnow, having finished a hard day's washing, hung the clothes on the line in Martha's garden and then settled down to a cosy tea with some hastily made saffron buns.

"All the strength's gone from me," said Nancy wearily.

"I'm only just beginnin' to feel warmed to the wringin' o' the clothes," said Martha.

"Thee was allus one to love a washin' day," said Nancy. She stirred her tea quietly and looked meditatively at a large lump of sugar which was slowly dissolving in the spoon she was holding out of her cup.

Martha smiled contentedly as she answered her friend:

"I 'ates allus doin' of the same thing; it makes me doley and snappy by turns. Now a washin' day, to me, be like a feast day be to some, and it sends my blood all of a glow." She slowly pulled her cotton sleeve over her strong arms, which were mottled into a damp softness from the long immersion in soapy water.

"Where's Bill to?" asked Nancy suddenly.

Martha tossed her head as she said:

"I don't know and I don't care. He'm a g'eat fool and I'm mazed with 'en. He's like a thorn i' my side more nor anythin' else, tho' he be my own nephew."

Nancy's eyes fell on a pair of boots which had been carefully placed on a shelf near the cupboard. She smiled as she turned towards her friend.

"Poor old Bill!" she said; "he's the talk of the place by now, I reckon."

"So he deserves to be," said Martha.

"I've never heard the full rights o' what happened," said Nancy. "I thought when I saw him this mornin' that he seemed like one took wi' a fear."

"So he be, sure enough," said Martha gravely. "When I spoke to he about those boots he turned quite queer i' the face, and he don't eat like a thing to-day, and his manner 'ave changed all to onc'st."

"Lor! you don't say?" queried Nancy.

"Minx's work," snapped Martha.

"Tell us the rights of it," said Nancy.

"Well!" began Martha, crossing her feet on the fender and sipping her tea with great contentment, "you and me knaws well enough he's like no sister's child of mine ought to be. Perhaps if his mother had lived to rear 'en things would have been different, but I cain't never make him up at all, though he is my own flesh and blood and in his one and twenty."

"He be a bit dreamy and slow-like," said Nancy;

"but he'll 'appen mend of that. After all, old maidens ought not to have the care of youngsters, and he've never gone wi' no companions to speak of."

"Hold thy noise about old maidens, or else speak only for thysel'," retorted Martha sharply. "The times is gone by for anyone under seventy to call theirselves up i' years, and I'm younger in heart to-day than Bill himself, I can tell thee. If I was a man instead of a woman, no giddy hussy could make me believe tight was loose, or short long."

Nancy looked admiringly at her friend.

"No, my dear, not where money comes in. I do knaw that well enough. No man could befool you."

"Say you don't knaw at all," replied Martha.

"Things is often contrary to what appears," and a half smile played on her strong mouth. "Anyway," she added sharply, "no livin' man should fool me twice, and every man I do knaw would 'ave to pay the penalty for bein' born a man if it so happened one of his kind 'ad ever had the better o' me."

"It's their natures to molest and overcome women," said Nancy. "It's meant so, I feel sure, and it don't do to expect any other," she added gently.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Martha. "It's women as overcomes men, but in a silenter manner. I've seen it scores o' times, only they don't fuss over it, and noise it abroad, like men do. Think o' that artful jade as 'ave crazed Bill."

"She never meant to, surely," said Nancy.

"No! not no more than that starling means buildin' in our scullery chimney," retorted Martha, pointing to a bird resting on the sill, with a long straw in its beak. "Apparently nowadays," she continued reflectively, "nobody means nothin' when they means the most of all."

Nancy's mind was rarely equal to the strain of thought Martha put upon it, so she said humbly:

"You've never told me the rights of Bill's tale yet."

"There ain't no rights as I can see," said Martha. "The thing's wrong from end to end. It's easy enough to tell, but it's a pitiable thing, to my mind."

Martha pointed solemnly to the pair of brand-new boots on the shelf near her.

"See they?" she asked.

Nancy nodded.

"They's the cause of the offence," snapped Martha, "and they'll remain as an abiding token of the foolishness of men." She cleared her throat as she went on: "Bill, as you do knaw, have never 'ad no best boots in his life, nothin' but they g'eat beetle crushers what he uses in the clay works. One day last week, I, like a weak soft, says to 'e: 'Here, take this ten bob, and put it to what thee's earned for the week, and go to Polkinhorn's shop up to Polcoath, and buy a pair o' real best boots.' It were only tenpence return, and I thought he'd get real style there. 'Don't tell no one, not even Nancy,' says I to he, thinking how you love a surprise, and how you'd open your eyes when

Sunday come, and he walked i' chapel in a pair of lovely brown boots wi' extra shiny toes."

Nancy smiled lovingly at Martha, and nodded her head as she asked softly :

"And what happened after that?"

"This," retorted Martha. "He up and went yesterday like a giddy goat mazed wi' his own grandeur, and took the train to Polcoath. He told me the rights of it when he come 'ome last night, like a daft thing, sure enough. It appears he went into Polkinhorn's shop, and he said he felt suddenly queer-like, when, instead of a man comin' towards him, up smirks a gaudy female, dressed in black, but wi' nothin' else black about her, so he said, except her soul, which the devil took care Bill should not see just then. White cuffs and collar, if you please, and a bib and tucker frilled lace sort o' apron. My dear life!" Martha continued irritably, "after questioning him all I knew how, I found out she'd even a flower, not only in her saucy bosom, but in her back hair. Think of the lustful pride o' that!" Martha fairly snorted. "It's like hearin' about a naked heathen somehow when you begin to think on it. Bill said as he could not stop lookin' at her, her lips was so red and her eyes flashin' like stars. How he ever managed to tell her what he wanted will remain a mystery to both him and me, for, from what he says, he seems to have lost his tongue directly minute the woman spoke. He says he forgot most of what happened after he'd managed to make her understand he wanted a pair

o' brown boots. Before he knew where he were he found 'iself sittin' in a big cushioned armchair made o' velvet, and the pert hussy 'ad actually got one of his boots off. He said all he could think on at the time was how glad he felt he'd chanced to put on clean socks i' the mornin', and had no holes for her to look upon. He said he should 'ave died o' shame if he'd not been tidy, for she were like a pink wi' the mornin' dew fresh on it. Those were the very words our slow-mouthed Bill applied to that brazen female. Think o' it all!" ended Martha in a loud voice.

"You do allus mend and make for he," said Nancy gently. "He rends his clothes i' pieces some thing, especially socks, as I do knaw, through always helpin' you to wash 'em; but you keeps up wi' the mendin' at all times."

Martha poured herself out some more tea, and drowned it with milk in her agitation.

"It appears it's the fashion to try on boots in some places instead of gettin' them in sizes like we belong to do, but Bill had no notion of this, and he couldn't think whatever was goin' to 'appen next. He began to sweat a power when this young woman, all smellin' of perfume and bendin' over his foot, began talkin' to him and lookin' up, smilin', into his face. It was the first time a female outside o' we had ever taken the leastest liberty with he, and it sent him all faintey like. He says he remembers nothin' more except that while she was lookin' up in his face, she was gently squeezin' his toes one by one, and he had

the imperence to say to me that he'd never felt so crazy happy in his life before. It's shameful," ended Martha.

"It's witchcraft," said Nancy. "He cain't be called responsible," she added gently.

"Well! be it as it may, there's the testimony of it," said Martha crossly, "and my money be buried in it too, for they boots be no manner o' use to no one."

"Why?" asked Nancy.

"Because that g'eat fool, I keep telling thee, looking into that young woman's eyes, went off into a sort of faint or somethin' like it, and when he come to hissel' his old boots was on his feet again, laced up and all. The wily temptress as 'ad bewitcht him stood by smirkin' at him with a brown-paper parcel in her hand, and all the words she made use of to him were: 'You'll find they're an exact fit, sir.' He said he fell over everyone and everything as he tore out of the shop, and all he prayed for was a sight of his own home and people again. So he can't be utterly lost," added Martha more gently.

"It were like a trance," said Nancy.

"He says he feels as if he'd been a long journey, and seen a heap o' new-fangled things," said Martha. "The rest you do knaw as well as I do," she continued, "and so do all the neighbours by now, I reckon. They boots could never have been no reasonable size or shape for any man, unless he was a dwarf. They may do for Bill's wife if ever he 'ave one, but that's all the use they'll

ever be. He turned fairly sick when he tried to wear them ten minutes this mornin'."

"Why don't he change 'em?" asked practical Nancy. "It would only be the fare forth and back, and that's better than losin' all the money on them."

Martha looked hard at Nancy.

"I'm surprised at your want o' sense, Nancy Curnow," Martha at last said. "I believe you quiet ones, be you women or men, be allus the most reckless when you come nigh some things. Do you think for one minute that I, a respectable female, would send that innocent lamb into a fiery hell o' temptation like that again, even if he had to go bootless all his natural life? There's Delilahs i' the Bible and out of it, and from all I can hear they's necessary evils, like snakes and toads, but," and she held the poker threateningly in the air before attacking the fire with it, "let 'em stay wallowin' in their own mire, or if they must poison and sting, let it be none o' we."

Martha's face had grown very stern, and her eyes were turned towards the ceiling as if in intercession for the peace of all decent families. She brushed some stray crumbs from the tablecloth as she added: "Bill 'ave been saved by that misfit, and saved he've got to remain. It's not all men as gets off so easy."

Nancy had risen from the table and was looking intently at the new boots, scarcely daring to touch them. At last she rubbed her forefinger softly over the shining toes and turned to Martha, who had come to her side.

"When he do look upon these, my dear," she said to Martha solemnly, "he'll for ever see that woman's eyes and be smellin', in a manner o' speakin', the flowers in her hair. The boots and she will allus be kind o' mixed up together in his heart. I should hide 'em away for a while."

Martha for once felt that Nancy's words were words of great wisdom. She took her friend's hand and clasped it in both her own, and for a little while she did not speak, and then she said, with a catch in her voice :

"My own heart should 'ave told me that, Nancy Curnow, for onc'st I had no peace till I'd destroyed somethin' as was between my soul and my Saviour."

Nancy trembled. Never before had Martha spoken in her hearing like that, and she waited for more. But not another word was said. With her mouth firmly set Nancy watched her friend take off the three iron rings that concealed the centre of the fierce fire which was always a part of a big washing day. One by one she dropped the evil omens into the blaze and watched them smoulder. Then her face brightened a little as she murmured :

"Poor chiel!"

She and Nancy watched the fire doing its slow but sure work of destruction. Then Martha added in a low voice :

"He'll miss 'em for a little while, for perhaps never again in all his life he won't chance on enough money to buy another pair, even if he've the heart to crave for 'em." Then, thrusting the burning

witnesses of Bill's first encounter with the wiles of the flesh further into the flames, she added: "Better they than he, for hell fire be a sure endin' when a woman once gets a chanc'st to ruin a man."

THE SUBJECTION OF KEZIA

Joe Pengilly washed his face and hands at the pump outside his kitchen door, and as an after-thought let the water trickle over his thin hair to cool his head. He had just glanced inside the house and felt "all abroad," as he said to himself. His usually good-tempered wife had the same look on her face he had seen for weeks, and it puzzled and jarred him. The woman, he owned to himself, was everything in the world to him, and now his life seemed threatened with dark clouds, and for no reason. He sighed as he went into the little kitchen for his mid-day meal.

Kezia Pengilly was bending over the fire frying mackerel, and the spluttering of the fat prevented her from hearing her husband's step. Joe walked over to his place at the top of the table and watched her at her work. He smiled to himself as he looked at her. Perhaps after all she would turn round just like herself again, and what a self it was, he thought. He knew he had been crazed with her

pretty ways and quaint jokes and smiles. Kezia turned suddenly and saw him.

"Why didn't thee speak?" she asked.

"Nothin' to say, my dear," said Joe with a smile.

Her brow puckered as she landed the fish from the bubbling fat on to a dish.

"Thee's not much company for sure," she said.

Joe took hold of the tail of his mackerel and began picking off the fish with his fingers, and did not look up.

"Can't thee answer?" she said sharply.

"To what?" he said.

"Why, to me, of course," she snapped.

He took a long drink of tea and gazed at her over his cup.

"Thee'rt a g'eat beauty, Kezia," he said, as he put the cup down.

"There you are again," she whimpered, "allus either grumblin' or jeerin' at me."

"I'm not doin' neither, woman. I'm tryin' for to make up for thrawting of you this mornin' over they soaked crusties as I gave the cat and ruined the nice clean floor."

"Now!" she cried angrily; "just when I were forgettin' all about it, of course you must bring it all up again, and you're tryin' now, all thee knows how, to make the tablecloth like a dishclout wi' thy g'eat greasy fingers."

For answer the man licked his fingers one by one and wiped them on his trousers.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed, almost crying, "that's thee all over. Thee gives up one dirty trick for

another. I believe you only married me to clean and tidy after you."

He laughed.

"Heart alive!" he said, as he looked into her young sweet face, which had a sort of sob all over it, and made his heart ache. "I married you because you are the only woman I've ever met i' my life I could never weary of, not even if you tormented me night and day."

Her brow suddenly cleared as she answered:

"You was allus one for pretty talk, Joe, but you's not a bit what you were in deeds."

"'Cause you snap me up so," he said.

"There you are again, tryin' to pick a quarrel," she answered moodily.

He got out his pipe and blew into it.

"Now, Joe," she said, "I cain't abide that 'baccy smell; it gives me a headache. Go outside and leave me to clear up if you've finished, for I'm fair worn out!"

He got up and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Kiss us, old girl," he said.

She shrugged his hand off.

"Don't be so silly," she said. "I don't feel like it at all, and I want to be 'ome with mother again."

Joe went out and lighted his pipe by the pump, gave a glance towards the window, and went to his work. His mind was busy, and he wondered how he could bring Kezia to her senses. When he went in to his tea he scarcely spoke, and never looked up at his wife. He went out as soon as he had eaten, to have a smoke and think things

out. He sat under a favourite gorse bush which served either as a shelter from the wind or a protection from the sun. The fishing boats with their dark brown sails were scudding towards the open sea, like large birds migrating towards a desired haven. There was no blue in the sea just then; all was grey, and Joe's pipe went out, for he seemed to have no energy to keep it in. He turned with an "Oh!" of surprise and relief as he saw Matthew Trevaskis slowly walking towards him.

"Come 'ere, mate, do," said Joe.

"Well, brother!" said Matthew, "thee looks as if thee'd run out o' speerits and 'baccy both."

"I'm moody, like a thing," said Joe.

Matthew laughed.

"Jaw, I suppose?" queried Matthew, as he sat on a big stone and fumbled in his sleeved waistcoat for a pipe. Then he slipped on to the ground, and used the stone as a support for his back as he turned towards his friend.

"Eh! jaw, isn't it?" he repeated, as he cut his shag with a large knife.

Joe nodded.

"Thought so," said Matthew. "Women's the devil that way. You began all wrong, like me, and females allus takes advantage of honeymoon ways, and stanks on we if we don't take 'em in hand to onc'st."

Joe sighed.

"Drat it all!" he said. "I never began no different to what I am now. I cain't make things up at all."

Matthew winked and looked sideways at Joe as he rubbed the tobacco round in the palms of his hands.
"Cheer up, brother," he said at last. "There's no bigger fool than a man as is sent crazy wi' a woman."
"Women is mazy things," said Joe solemnly.
"There's allus 'baccy for to fortify us against 'em," said Matthew, and he lighted his pipe and drew a breath of relief.
"Kezia 'ates 'baccy in the house," said Joe.
"Smoke all the time then," muttered Matthew; "it's the only way."
Joe smiled and folded his hands over his smooth head of hair.
"You allus forgets I'm bent on pleasin' of Kezia," he said.
Matthew had crossed his arms and stretched out his legs, and his face was calm and thoughtful.
"The more thee tries to please women, mate, the more crotchety they becomes. Within bounds I keep the peace in our place like a judge, but she've learnt, Jane Ann 'ave, that I'll put my foot down on any out-o'-the-way tantrums. Give them their head and they'll soon 'ave we by the heels."
"Sometimes I wonder if we give 'em their head enough," said Joe. "Perhaps they'd domineer less if we left 'em take their own grainy ways."
"You bet!" said Matthew emphatically. "If I gave in to Jane Ann entirely, where the devil do 'e think I should be at all?"
Joe fixed his eyes on his friend's face and laughed outright as he answered:

"Man alive, I've no notion."

"Well!" said Matthew shortly, "I should be like a cat out in the rain, never certain where to put my feet. As it is, as you do know, I can't keep no dog for fear of the mess its feet 'ud make on the floor; I can't have a magpie in a cage 'cause its seed 'ud 'appen fall on the table. I've got to walk ginger like Tobias Penberthy for fear o' disturbin' the sand on the clean floor, and I rubs my feet on the mat afore I goes in to my meals, enough to split it i' half. I gives in to all they things 'cause I was took captive over 'em, in a manner o' speakin', almost afore I'd finished courting, and it takes years to understan' women's whims. Bein' a real pal to thee, Joe, I'm warnin' of 'e now afore it's too late, for thee's only been wed two years, and there's time yet to alter things."

Joe's thinking had been keeping pace with Matthew's talking, and he had come to a conclusion. He sidled up closer to Matthew and stuck his elbow into his mate's ribs.

"Matthey," he said.

"Iss," answered Matthew.

"Don't you think it's too late even now?"

"Fur what?" asked Matthew. "It's no use speakin' i' riddles, man. Trust or no trust—that's my plan. Thee's the only livin' man as I've blackened Jane Ann to, and if it'll ease thy mind to tell what's worritin' of thee, you do knaw it's as safe as if you'd dropt your secret into the mouth of a mine shaft."

"Done!" said Joe, and he turned over on his side,

and came nearer Matthew, so as to be closer to his "earhole," as he expressed it.

Matthew was cleaning out his clay pipe very carefully with his knife, and knocking it against the stone which now served as a resting-place for both men.

"Sling along!" at last said Matthew.

This seemed to be the last thing Joe could do. He seemed suddenly struck dumb. At last he blurted out, as he wiped his forehead with his red handkerchief:

"Awkward kind o' work pullin' your lawful wife to bits."

Matthew laughed.

"It'll get easier as thee goes on, man. I'll help thee. What's the row to-day?"

"Crusties," said Joe.

Matthew winked at his friend.

"It's allus some feeble thing like that as makes confusion in a house. Jane Ann began just like that. Dirty boots i' the best parlour was my first offence, and it raised hell in our house for nigh on a whole day."

Joe felt easier as he said with a laugh:

"Well! I never! It was just the same thing in a way with me. I soaked the crusties in my tea this mornin' and threw 'em to the cat under the table, and I suppose I must 'ave put my foot on 'em, for Kezia went off like a thing gone mazy. She stormed and said"—and Joe wiped his brow again—"said as she were a fool to take me and all sorts, and then she cried fit to kill hersel', and when I

spoke she told me to hold my noise, and when I didn't speak she said I'd no feelin's and was worse nor a stone. We scarcely spoke at dinner-time. She said she wished she was dead, and wanted her mother, and that, bein' a man, I was worse nor a devil, and when I kept on eatin' she said she wondered the food didn't choke me, and when I stopped eatin' she said I was never pleased wi' nothin' she'd got ready for me. My head's sore with the clang of the teasy things she drove into me, and I'm not good at replies, as you do knaw," he ended in a weary voice.

Matthew was smoking hard, and his eyes were on the ground.

"Women be mysteries," said Matthew, "and without little uns they'm worse nor monsters. A chiel do often alter and soften 'em, but a childless woman is as near a wolf as anything I do knaw."

Joe's knees were supporting his two elbows, and these in their turn supported his woebegone face.

"That's it, is it?" he said at last, with a catch in his voice.

"Iss!" said Matthew, "that's the mischief. Unless," and he looked suddenly up at Joe, "perhaps she be goin' to surprise 'e by tellin' 'e she be going to have a little one: that would account for her bein' teasy and moody."

Joe laughed.

"Lor!" he said, smiling. "Why, I should be the first to know that, surely?"

"Not a bit of it," said Matthew. "Women loves secrets o' that sort, and my wife knew a woman

once as never told her man for over four months, and she acted a bit like Kezia."

"No! 'tain't that at all," said Joe. "I only wish it was, if what you say be true of women."

"True enough, my son. I did the 'cutest day's work in my life when I persuaded Jane Ann to sort of take Joe to help we. I watched the two of 'em together, and found he caught his tonguing too from she, but it had a sort o' nestle sound in it, as if she were a cuddlin' of him. She've been gentler wi' me too ever since Joe come back (you remember his mother and father sent for 'en once, and he come home to we again because he ate so much). Jane Ann have been as different as different since then, as she feels he really belongs to we now."

Joe was scratching his head as he said very slowly: "I don't know of no sister's child to take on for Kezia at all. What's the next best remedy, think you?"

"A thrashin'," said Matthew.

"A what?" asked Joe.

"Wollop her just onc'st," said Matthew, without looking at his friend.

Joe's hand came down from his head, and it was clenched as he turned towards Matthew.

"Shame on thee, mate! I feel more like strikin' thee than a female. I'm sorry I told thee, if thee can offer no more help than that. I'm not much of a chap, but I've never struck a woman yet."

"Strike on principle then!" said Matthew, still not looking at his mate.

"How?" asked Joe.

"Like the Almighty strikes when He've got a lesson for we to learn which we won't learn without stripes and tears. Nothin' is of no avail to stop His chastisement if He do think it's going to work out His plan for He and we, and that's what I'm wantin' of you to do by your wife for her sake more than for yours. Wives must learn to submit," he went on harshly. "It's Divine Providence as 'ave ordered it, and women be miserable, like ivy and trailers of all sorts, if they've no prop to bear 'em up. Beat her once, and it'll make a man of you and be a warnin' to she."

"But I love her, man!" said Joe softly. "The very thought o' hurtin' of her makes me creep," and he shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Women likes bein' hurt; it's like fondlin' to 'em at times," said Matthew.

"Lor!" said Joe humbly. "I never heard that afore. How can you be sure of that at all?"

"I've travelled," said Matthew decisively. "I ain't been to Africa for nothin', mate. I've seen a deal o' things, which if I'd happened on afore I courted Jane Ann would 'ave got me through the marriage scrimmage wi' no tiles off of my roof. That's why I'm a-warnin' of you afore it's too late. Your woman be worth gettin' i' trim, for she's—well, she's——"

Joe's eyes were on his friend's face as he finished the sentence for his pal:

"She's the best sort o' woman a man could 'ave for a sweetheart when her moods is off, and it's only lately her've altered, and I expect it is my fault."

"Certainly it is," cried Matthew; "you've never shown master yet, and you must this very night."
Joe coughed.
"How?" he asked nervously.
"You must thrash her before it's too late. Have 'e a cane?"
Joe jumped up, pulled down his waistcoat, twisted round his necktie, undid it, tied it again, and said:
"You'm a fair brute, Matthew."
"And you'm a coward," retorted Matthew, as he sat with his hands clasped round his right knee. "I've given you golden advice, and if only a pal had given it to me years ago, I shouldn't be sittin' out here now, but be comfortable in my own chimney corner."
Joe put his hands in his pockets.
"I cain't stomach the idea at all," he said; "it's like murderin' a baby, somehow."
"Stuff!" said Matthew. "You needn't lay on too hard to make bruises nor nothin'."
Joe went pale.
"Good Lord!" he said. "Bruises! why, man, she've got flesh like a flower."
Matthew looked at Joe with a smile.
"I almost envies thee, mate," he said; "why, thee's fair daft wi' love still."
"Of course I be," said Joe sullenly. "She's more nor meat and drink to me; allus 'ave been since the first day I took to she."
"All the more reason for thee to beat her, and at onc'st," said Matthew sternly. "You'll lose her,

sure enough, if you don't. It's the only chance for thee now, and I do knaw I'm speakin' gospel truth."

Joe sat down again and meditated with his head in his hands.

"I'll do it," he said, after a long pause. "It'll nearly be the finish of me; but if you're certain sure she'll love me more after, I'll shut my eyes and set my teeth and—and—yes, upon my soul I'll do it."

Matthew wrung his friend's hand.

"I swear it, brother," said Matthew solemnly; "I've never once known it fail."

"Never once in all your travels?" asked Joe anxiously.

Matthew looked down.

"Iss!" he said slowly. "Once, sure enough, but the woman had never cared twopence for the man to start wi'. After it she left 'en altogether."

"Oh!" said Joe.

"See?" said Matthew. "You see it was no fair start like a thing?"

"No, to be sure," muttered Joe.

"Now!" said Matthew, striking Joe's shoulder, "now for it!"

Joe twisted round, and a miserable smile was on his lips as he asked:

"Well, what now?"

Matthew bent towards his pal and whispered:

"We must go and buy the cane."

"Sakes!" said Joe.

"Bear up!" said Matthew. "It'll all be over by

this time to-morrow night, and that's a great stand-by, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," said Joe gloomily.

The two men got up slowly and took the narrow path which would lead them into the main road. To the casual observer they were only two workmen lurching along after their day's toil, almost too tired to talk. The curious roll of their walk suggested a lethargy of temperament which comes of living in a moist and enervating climate. Their shoulders were slightly bent and their hands in their pockets. As they neared the town, Joe said:

"Who'll be spokesman?"

"Me," answered Matthew. "How far will 'e go in price!"

The disconsolate look in Joe's face said plainly that this point was not uppermost in his mind. He simply said:

"Don't know, my son, and I don't care."

"Will sixpence ruin 'e?"

Joe smiled as he shook his head.

They went into a shop in the town and bought what they wanted, Joe looking furtively about each time his pal consulted him.

"It 'ave made me sweat like a bull!" was the only observation he made as they sauntered towards their homes.

When they neared Joe's house, Matthew turned towards his friend.

"It's just on nine o'clock," he said, as he looked at his watch. "Go in, and don't stop to think, but

set at it to onc'st, and she'll have time to come round afore you settle for the night. Bein' Saturday, all the neighbours be mostly i' town shoppin', and if there should be a scream I'll make up a yarn to anyone who comes out, for I shan't be far off till I guess it's all over."

Joe was very white and his teeth were set. His eyes had a glazed look which vexed Matthew, and he said roughly :

" Thee deserves to lose her if thee be real chicken-'earted like this."

That settled Joe. He lifted his door-latch and went into the kitchen. The light was lowered on the kitchen table, and the cat was curled up asleep before the almost empty grate. He caught his breath. His wife must have gone to bed. He grasped the cane firmly in his hand, and mounted the creaking stairs, wishing there were a thousand of them. He crept up very softly, and found the bedroom door open. Kezia was in her night-dress before the looking-glass, her white arms and hands making big shadows on the wall as she plaited her hair in two long braids for the night. Joe turned quite giddy and almost fell against the door. This roused Kezia. She turned and looked at him, and the sight of her face almost bewildered him. Even in their courting days he had never seen such a look on it as that. His two hands instinctively went behind his back and held the cane so that she could not see it. They stood some time looking at one another. The purity and simplicity of his wife as she stood like a girl

before him suddenly subdued the man and the would-be woman-tamer. She tossed one plait over her shoulder in a coy little way as she said to her husband :

"Seen a ghost, Joey, my dear, or is it Kezia come to her senses at last, think you ? "

Joe never stirred. He was wishing Matthew and his advice at the bottom of the sea. He leaned against the door and looked long and lovingly at Kezia.

"What's come to thee, lass ? " he said.

"Guess ! " she said, as she clasped her hands behind her small head.

"Cain't at all," he answered, smiling.

"Come inside, sweetheart," she said, as she sat down on the edge of the bed.

The man longed to take her in his arms. Her voice had the old ring in it, her eyes the soft, sweet look which had made him her own. He could not drop the cane, because it would betray him. The sight of it might bring back Kezia the shrew, so he was in a great dilemma. He suddenly lurched in and sat down by her side on the bed, the cane by his side, the side the farthest from her.

"Kezia," he said under his breath, as he put his arms round her.

"Joey, my dear," she said softly.

There was a long pause, and at last Kezia broke it.

"He'll be the dearest little thing a woman ever bore," she said.

Joe looked at his wife suddenly, kissed her gently on her eyes and brow, and lingered on the mouth she held up to him.

"Heaven cain't be more desirable than this," said Joe very quietly.

"To think there'll be three of we soon," she said happily. "You see now why I've been so teasy lately. Now I'll sing all day long, so he'll be a happy boy."

Joe never spoke. He felt that long, hard rod against his leg, and he almost laughed at his own misery an hour ago.

"Thee'rt smiling, Joe!" she said. "Thee and me 'ave both hungered for the same thing. Did thee guess it at all, I wonder? I've kept it from thee a bit to make quite sure. But lor! my dear life! whatever be this that you've got 'ere?"

Joe sat quite still, and Kezia pulled out the long yellow cane.

They both looked at it very solemnly for a few minutes, and then Kezia burst into a merry laugh, but her lips trembled.

"Eh! Joe!" she said softly. "Thee was allus unlike other chaps; that's why I do love thee so. Fancy thee guessing and going to buy him somethin' to onc'st!"

She put her face in her hands and sobbed and laughed together.

"Oh! it brings it so near like," she went on. "Most men would 'ave thought of a cradle or a rattle, but thee!—Oh! my dear!" and she threw her arms round his neck, "thee thought of the first beatin' we should be forced to give 'en, for, of course, he'll be a lad of tremenjous spirit."

"So he will!" exclaimed Joe suddenly. "Both

his father and mother be folk o' g'eat spirit, and," added Joe, as he tried the cane on his hard hand, "the first time as he dirts the tablecloth or frets his mother I'll lay it on him as, thanks be, I've never laid it on nobody yet."

A HARD DAY

"Good evenin' to you, my dear," said Martha Hicks to Jane Treglisson, one fine June night. "How be 'e at all? I've scarce set eyes on 'e since that spurt wi' the bobby and Caroline Ann there," and she jerked her thumb in the direction of the little white cottage near.

Jane Treglisson smiled.

"We ain't seen the end o' that yet," she said, rubbing her forehead slowly. She still bore the marks of the famous fight between her neighbour and herself, when "her soul had been torn out of the top of her head," as Wilmot Tregarth expressed it.

"Police-Constable Uren ain't no fool at all, and I'm expectin' a rare surprise for she," jerking her finger towards the wall, "when he've had his say to the inspector. To think o' she flyin' like a turkey cock at me 'cause I shook my own door-mat against my own door-post. How was I to know there were black pepper all over it, and, if it was there, how were I to know it would go into her leery eyes?"

"Of course not, my dear," said Martha reassuringly. "I never took to that woman after she'd once lived so many years in Americy. She've never really favoured we since. She seems now more like a foreigner or uplong, and I cain't abear they."
Jane Treglisson sighed as she said :
"Lor ! woman ! the doctor do say I must keep my head quiet for a bit o' while, but it's gone like a traction engine to-day, for I've done more nor ever I belong to do on a washin' and bakin' day in one."
"Why, what 'ave you been workin' at ? " asked Martha, as she sat down in the little corner settle.
"Well ! I began wi' sittin' in my winder to do a bit o' mendin', but first one thing come along and then another, and I were fair mazed wi' it all. I'd no sooner settled down than, if you please, I sees John Rogers come along lookin' as 'igh and mighty as a magistrate on a bench. I hollered after he to know wherever he were off to in that hurry, but I were too late. I got no answer at all. I fair itched to know whoever could 'ave been this late payin' of their rates. I craned my neck, my dear, till I saw 'en go into Bob Olds's house. He were there a long while, and that kept me on the stretch, in a manner o' speakin', till I feel all askew like, even now." She rubbed her thin, long neck irritably and went on : "He were there close on half an hour, and came out wi' a look on his face like a whipped dog, and I sall never know the rights o' that," ended Jane sadly.
Martha laughed.

"And Bob Olds 'ave allus the manner of his betters on Sundays," she said, "and 'as the airs of a man as pays his way at all times."

"Well, my dear, he ought to have the bounce o' two wi' a wood mouse of a wife like he've got," said Jane. "Not that I dislike the woman at all," she added.

"Tobias Penberthy can brighten she up well enough," said Martha with a laugh.

"Iss, sure enough," responded Jane. "They'm like two doves when they'm together, and Bob be like a g'eat blind rooster struttin' and crowin', wi' nothin' but noise to commend him."

"Well! what else 'ave e' done to-day?" asked Martha.

"What I've told 'e were only the beginning of my day," said Jane. "It 'ave wore me so I feel as if I should be too tired to sleep. I'd 'ardly settled down again when who should I see a-comin' past my door, wobblin' from side to side on a bicycle, if you please, but Harriet Jane, Widow Trevaskis's g'eat fat grandchiel!"

At the recollection of this Mrs Treglisson held her sides with laughter, and Martha ejaculated:

"My Gosh! what next?"

"It were a sight to see, I can tell 'e," went on Mrs Treglisson. "It were like watchin' a toad on a hot grill. Her g'eat fat carcase was near breakin' the springs o' the thing as she bounced down along. Well! I were bound to know the rights o' that, for I couldn't make out where she'd got the machine and what it all meant; and if you believe me," she

went on rapidly, "I 'ad to go into five neighbours' housen afore I got at the real rights of it; but I did at last," she ended triumphantly.

"Lor!" said Martha. "Fish girls will be startin' of bicycles next. G'eat awkward straddle leg things, to my mind, which would 'ave been hooted out of the place when I were young. My own two legs be good enough for me."

"And me too," said Mrs Treglisson a little moodily. "Nobody would lend me things if I did want 'em ever so, and no artists' wives comes to teach me to ride no bike. It's well to have carroty hair enough to set a hayrick on fire, seems to me. It leads to artists wantin' the person as 'as it for to sit to 'em, and from that to presents is a near step, I notice." She sighed as she ended, and her pale face looked suddenly very old and tired.

"Forthy maid, that!" said Martha, "and no notion o' bakin' or scrubbin', and her granny nigh starvin'."

"Things nowadays is gettin' all twisty and crosty," said Jane Treglisson. "The old uns 'ave allus to spoil the young uns seemly. I'm almost glad I've no chiel, for I'm not one for pettin' and fussin', even what I likes the most."

"Nor me," said Martha.

"I got quite a turn, talkin' o' pettin'," said Jane suddenly. "This afternoon, just when I'd finished my bit o' pastry, who should I see go by the winder, linking, if you please, like a courtin' couple, but Jim Curtis and Ned Olds's eldest girl. I got up to onc'st, my dear, but lor! they was out o' sight

billin' and cooin' for their lives, and I all of a shake at the sight of 'em. I went into Wilmot's to hear the full rights of it, but she took it very calm, for she said my window panes shows things wrong sometimes through 'avin poor glass in it, and she said it were Jim's own girl and not Maria Olds at all."

"Stuff!" said Martha. "A sickly preacher 'ave got the earhole o' Wilmot lately, and now whatever you do say against a neighbour she turns it into a different class o' thing altogether. I'm one to like black to be black, and I've more respect for it real black than when it's a washy grey, like a thing."

Jane was smiling at Martha as she said :

"I don't know no one i' the world who is so soothin' to talk to as you be, Martha Hicks."

"Thank 'e kindly, Jane Treglisson," answered Martha curtly. "It's allus better, though, to be my friend than my foe. I've a nettly tongue when I'm roused."

Jane made no comment, but went to the little drawer in the kithen-table. She brought out a letter, opened it carefully, and pulled Martha towards it.

"Read that," she said.

Martha glanced at the paper before her and said :

"In my young days readin' and writin' wasn't of much account, so it do take me a g'eat while for to master the full sense of a thing like that," pointing to the letter on the table. "What be it at all?"

Jane coughed.

"The postman left it 'ere this aternoon," she said,

"and you see whose name be on the envelope, and in a man's writin' too: big and sprawly and audacious-like. Well, my dear," coming closer to Martha, "I know you'll commend me for this, for if neighbours don't look after one another, who will, I should like for to ask?"

Martha looked puzzled as she said:

"I don't follow 'e at all."

"See!" said Jane, as she poked Martha in the ribs. "I itched to know the rights of all this, for you know the talk there've been lately over she and that lodger fellow who were here a bit since. Well, I up and took a kettle o' boilin' water (all these things takes time, I'll have 'e knaw) and I opened the letter to find out the rights of it all. Of course, you understand, I never did it for no pryin' at all, and I'd be better pleased than anyone if she could clear herself, for I likes the woman well enough, and—" with a little gasp—"you understand, of course, that's why I've done what I 'ave over this 'ere. It were time wasted partly," added Jane. "All there was in it was askin' of she if he could come again in her rooms by and by, when he were off duty. Of course," she added, "there's more there, I'm thinkin', than you or me could ever find out, but to all appearances it's a innocent letter enough."

"It don't allus do to believe the blackest of even a neighbour at all times," said Martha thoughtfully.

Jane slowly put the letter back in its envelope, and licked the surface before pressing it down with the palm of her hand.

"There!" she said. "Who'll be the wiser but you and me? The postman can have it when next he comes. There's many things remedied i' this world by a friend knowin' aforehand how to act."

Jane turned suddenly as she saw Martha going towards the door.

"Lor! Martha! don't go yet," she cried. "I've lots more to tell thee, for it 'ave been a 'eavy day, sure enough!"

"Iss!" answered Martha, and her face was a little white under her turned down black hat. "I'm not for reprimandin' a neighbour at all, mind; everyone knaws their own work best; but if doin' o' things like that," pointing to the letter, "be the only means o' settin' a village right, give me, my dear, light days and not heavy ones, for it 'ud lie heavy on my conscience when I come to sleep, for fear I'd be found out, and be a gibe to they who was worse nor me."

Martha slowly closed the door and went into the street.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Jane Treglisson to herself. "Martha be a Christian woman according to her lights, but narrow-minded over some things, sure enough."

COURTSHIP

I

Tobias Olds stood before his looking-glass in his little hired bedroom and gazed at his face with nervous dread. It was very red, for after many violent tugs at his stiff high collar, he felt as if he were going to have a fit. A flannel shirt, open at the throat, was more to his taste, but he knew what girls needed when they walked out with their sweethearts, and he was determined to live up to the traditions of his race. After one more gasp and wrench, in order to try and loosen the tight collar, he turned to a little drawer, opened it, and took out three ties. One he rejected at once. It was a pale mauve with black spots.

"More like a funeral," he muttered. He hesitated over a dark red tie, but eventually chose a very bright blue one. He tied and untied this at least half-a-dozen times, until the front of the white collar had distinct marks on it where his half-clean fingers had been. Purple and red patches of colour spread over Tobias's face. "Darn clothes!" he

muttered. "They'm mazy things, sure enough, and I'm feelin' like a trussed fowl already," and he glanced apprehensively at some shining brown boots near his bed.

These he put on very slowly, making wry faces as he did so, for when he stooped the tight collar caught him like a halter, and the large shirt-front bulged out with its own dignity. At last the boots were on, and Tobias stood up, sighed, shook himself, and put the little looking-glass on the floor to see the effect.

"Brave and little feet in they," he muttered. "To walk far i' these and court at the same time will knock me up for clay-work to-morrow." He lifted the glass slowly, so as to get a good view of his smart blue trousers and jacket, and when he had got as far as the tie he muttered again: "Masher, sure enough!"

Something did not quite please him as he put the glass down, and his face was grave as he still surveyed himself in the mirror. He went to a little cupboard and brought out a small bottle containing a thick yellow fluid. He undid the cork, smelt at the contents of the bottle, and proceeded to pour some carefully on to the palm of his left hand. Then he rubbed his hands together and brushed the liquid well into his hair, which, after a time, shone to his satisfaction, for he nodded at his image in the little glass. With his tongue hanging out, because of his pre-occupation with the top of his head, he carefully plastered his thin hair over his forehead in a slight curve, and at the

sight of this triumph of art over nature, Tobias leaped in the air and clapped his hands. He ran to the wash-basin and scrubbed the oil from his fingers, whistling softly to himself "Jerusalem the Golden." He took a bowler hat from a drawer near by, and very carefully placed it on the side of his head, giving it a careful but firm pat on the top with his open hand to keep it in its place. The door opened suddenly, and his room mate came in.

"Gosh!" cried Ben Rogers, "what 'ave we here?" Tobias winked at Ben and coloured to the roots of his hair.

"A mash, sure enough!" said Ben, and he eyed Tobias from head to foot with an envious contempt. "They boots alone be like a gen'leman born, my son."

"They'll pass," said Tobias modestly. "Thanks be, it ain't a dampin' night."

"Hair-oil be plentiful," said Ben.

"So be imperance, seemly," retorted Tobias.

"Thy collar be nearly hangin' off thee already," said Ben, with an envious eye on his friend's neck. "Thanks be, I've never felt no callin' to hitch myself in a thing like that."

"Wait!" said Tobias.

"Fur what?" asked Ben.

Tobias hung his head, fearing he had given himself away, but he added hastily:

"For a call."

Ben whistled, as he said gravely:

"Took wi' religion, mate, be you? It don't usually take a feller that way."

"Sometimes it do," said Tobias quickly. "Cleanliness be next to godliness, we're told."

Ben was puzzled, and he sat on the bed to gather his wits together.

"We're warned against pride," said Ben, "and that," pointing to his friend's shirt-front, "is nothin' but lustful pride."

"It's for a girl," said Tobias slowly.

"For what?" cried Ben.

"You heard all right," growled Tobias.

"You'm mad," said Ben.

"Why?" asked Tobias.

"She'll never look at you," said Ben.

Tobias strode towards his friend and said fiercely:

"How the devil can you tell that?"

"I knows the breed," said Ben. "It's all glitter and jaw wi' they, and a lot of masterfulness. You've none."

Tobias went back and looked in the glass. He turned suddenly towards Ben.

"My eyes be fierce enough," he said, "and my studs and hair shines like real gold, and as for masterfulness, wait till I've had my first kiss!"

"That's the first bit o' real speerit I've ever beheld in thee," said Ben, with reluctant admiration. "Go on, mate. Love 'ave taught you a thing or two already, but who's the girl? You've kept it some quiet, old man."

For answer Tobias put his thumb to his nose and winked at Ben. The two men laughed together as Tobias said:

"I'm not such a Johnny as I look."

"I shall spy on thee," said Ben slowly.

"I shall knock your eyes in if you do," said Tobias.

Ben got up and put his hands on his friend's shoulders, as he said slowly:

"Man, thee's changing, sure enough! Takin' to love and fightin' i' one night; what next?"

"We shall see," said Tobias, with a smile growing on his lips.

"You're cocksure, I'm thinking," said Ben, "and that shows you don't know your quarry."

"She've given me to understand," said Tobias.

"That's a bad sign," said Ben slowly. "If they're forthy they don't mean coming on; and if they're backward, look out! They'll have their arms round you in no time."

"Which way are they with thee, mate? Thee seems to know a terrible lot," said Tobias.

"Enough to keep away," cried Ben. "I wouldn't have any of 'em at a gift. They'm a whisht jest i' any man's life."

The clock struck eight.

"I'm off," cried Tobias.

As he went out of the door Ben muttered, dangling his legs from the bed:

"Eight o'clock, and Wednesday night, too. The reg'lar courtin' night, sure enough. He's in dead earnest, and I'm broke," and his mouth grew grave as he continued under his breath: "He'm a grand mate, and I like his silent, deep manners, and I've got used to him now." He jumped from the bed on to the floor as he murmured slowly:

"I've lost him. He'll win a woman if he's set his heart on her, and she'll play with him like a cat plays wi' a mouse. The worst is, he'll think he's happy when he's really miserable without me to jaw with him in the evenings, and"—here he sighed deeply—"the measly part of the whole thing is that he'll happen never know what's wrong wi' him till his dying day."

II

Susan Curtis, with a frown on her brow, sat looking into the street one fine June night. She was waiting for her best friend, who was late in coming from her work. It was Susan's hour of relaxation. She served in a shop in the chief street in the small town, and all day, and every day, Susan had to meet each stranger who came in with her head a little bent on one side and an engaging smile on her lips, though in her heart there was anything but a kindly feeling to the world at large. She had no parents, and her one longing in life was to have someone for her very own—someone to whom she was of vital importance. The kitten in the little cottage she stayed in with her fellow-worker was the only thing in the world that regarded her in the light of an ideal, or to whom she was a necessity. The girl with whom she lived received Susan's friendship as a matter of course, and no one knew better than Susan that the affection was nearly all on one side.

"Oh!" suddenly exclaimed Susan. "There you are!" and the morose little face, with its thin lips and upturned nose, brightened as she added: "You're late, sure enough."

There was a flutter and a spring on the stairs, and the door opened. Loveday Oliver tripped into the room, and threw her hat on the bed and her lace scarf after it.

"Oh!" ejaculated Loveday with a smile, as she sat down on a chair. "Hot, isn't it?"

Susan ran to the water bottle, and poured some water out for her friend to drink.

"Thanks," said Loveday; "and I've drunk two cups o' tea just now wi' Mrs Richards, too!"

"That's where you've been," said Susan, as her eyes followed every movement of the girl before her. Loveday was opening first one drawer and then another, and slamming them to again as she threw out a bit of lace, a little silk handkerchief with a yellow border, and a white lace hat with a large feather.

"Sakes!" cried Susan, under her breath.

"What's up?" Loveday tossed her head, and her pretty mouth pouted winsomely as she asked the question.

Susan's eyes hardened as she said: "You'm prettier nor ever, Loveday. If I was a chap——"

"Shut up!" said Loveday. "Don't be a soft."

Susan turned her head towards the window.

"It's courtin' night," she said slowly.

"Queen Anne be dead," said Loveday.

"Loveday Oliver!" cried Susan, turning round

and facing her friend as she went on: "You've real designs this time. It 'ave just struck me."

"Smart girl!" said Loveday.

"Mercy on us!" said Susan. "It gives me a shivery feelin' only to think of it. It's all so unbeknowns and awful, somehow, in a manner of speakin', and we seems mad to run after it."

"After what?" asked Loveday, as she held the tongs over the little stove before curling her hair.

"Love!" said Susan slowly.

Loveday coiled her front hair round the tongs and twisted them fiercely, till she had almost touched her forehead, and as she did so she looked at herself fixedly in the little glass. Susan watched her with bated breath, and as Loveday turned, their eyes met.

"You'm jealous 'cause you've no chap," said Loveday sharply.

"Iss!" said Susan shortly.

Loveday's brow was puckered as she said: "You soft."

"It's no good hidin' the feelin'," said Susan crossly. "There's nothin' so hard as lookin' on at some things."

"Perhaps it won't come off," said Loveday slyly, as she slid two common little combs into the sides of her hair and poked out her fringe with a hat-pin.

"Iss, it will, if you're bent on him," said Susan slowly. "There's no other end for he if you're bent on him."

"Stuff!" said Loveday. "He'm not a herrin' i' a net, girl!"

"No!" said Susan slowly; "but he'm a strong

young man mazed wi' your beauty and catching ways, and you know the tricks to fetch men on with."

"You've taught me," said Loveday.

"By words only," said Susan; "but you've got the way to draw 'em by nature, like a thing. I ain't got the manner at all, but I can reckon it all up same as if I had, for it's all inside me, same as in you."

Loveday was nearly ready, and she asked Susan to pin her belt to her dainty white skirt.

"You've taught me a lot about chaps," said Loveday, as she patiently stood before her mirror while Susan did the odds and ends of things in a woman's dress which can never be satisfactorily done by herself.

"Iss!" said Susan, as she took a pin out of her mouth to fasten into the belt.

"I'm allus stand-offish, as you do know; but I feel a coming-on sort of feelin' wi' this slow-tongued Tobias Olds. He's so quiet and slow, but he seems fairly crazed wi' me somehow. If it wasn't the very unwisest thing to do, I could throw my arms round 'en and fair hug 'en this very night."

Susan caught her breath as she said sharply:

"I feel tempted to tell you to do it, but I wants you to be happy, so I tells you that if ye do, your game's up. Fling 'en off again and again. If he's bent on 'e he'll foller you madder nor ever; if he isn't, it'll do no harm, but good to all o' we, for it don't do to let men think we're crazy over 'em.

Toss your pretty head and swing your dress round your heels and slap him i' the face, in a manner o' speakin'. He'll be at your feet to onc'st."

Loveday looked hard into Susan's bitter little face as she knelt on the floor putting the finishing touches to the front of her friend's skirt.

"Susie, you've been chucked, and you've never told me!"

A large tear slowly rolled down Susan's face as she said: "And so will ye be if you give in too easy. It's the chase they do love every bit as much as we. I 'ates 'em really," she said, under her breath.

"No, you don't," said Loveday roughly; "you adores 'em in your heart."

"Not like I do you," said Susan faintly.

"Goose!" said Loveday. "I should be nowhere to-morrow if the right chap came along. Think I don't know?"

"Your very eyes are brighter," said Susan inconsequently, "and your clothes sit on you prettier, and you look ever so sparkly, somehow."

Loveday was bored, and covered her mouth with her hand to hide a yawn as she turned towards the door.

"Good-bye, old girl," said Loveday; "wish me a brave time."

Susan hung her head as she got up from the floor.

"Give us a kiss," she said suddenly.

Loveday held a cold cheek.

"No!" snapped Susan crossly, "mouth!"

Loveday laughed as she asked: "What would he say?"

"'Tain't his yet, and I keep tellin' you you're a fool if you kiss too sudden. They loves not to be sure, and they likes to be off and on for long enough. Kiss 'en to-night and you're done for."

"Well, here's a smacker for you, then," said Loveday, as she put her arms round Susan's neck, and added: "If I don't hug someone tight to-night I shan't be able to get along at all, for I feels hungry and crazy for frolic, and kissin' be only that."

Susan's eyes brightened. "You can hug once in a way," she said, as she gazed into Loveday's glowing face. "You must care a bit for me to hug me as tight as that," and she watched her friend down the passage, and never saw the little shrug of the pretty shoulders, or the murmur of "You little fool," as Loveday went out into the street.

III

Tobias Olds stood near a disused blacksmith's shop, evidently waiting for someone, for he coughed nervously at intervals, and pulled down his waistcoat every few seconds.

"Kind o' sweatin' work," he muttered, "waitin' for a lingering girl." As he looked up, Loveday Oliver stood before him.

"Evenin'," said Tobias.

Loveday smiled and made no answer. Tobias put his hat a little more on one side. Loveday shook the dust from her skirt, and looked at Tobias out of the corners of her eyes. Tobias stuck the heel of his

brown boot into the earth as he said under his breath : "Sky looks tender : it'll make rain before mornin'."

"Iss ! " said Loveday.

There was a long pause, and Loveday adjusted her hat, and fastened the lower button of her gloves.

"Let's be movin'," said Tobias.

"Iss ! " said Loveday.

Tobias pointed with his finger first in one direction and then in another, as he asked : "Down along or up along ? "

Loveday nodded her head towards the lower path.

"Come on, then," said Tobias.

The two walked in silence for some time, and at last Tobias said slowly : "Still night for a walk."

"Iss ! " said Loveday.

Tobias looked down at the girl by his side and shyly peered under the large white hat as he asked : "Are you quite well ? "

"Iss," answered Loveday ; "I'm never ill."

"Ah ! " said Tobias, with a sigh of relief, "that's good hearin', anyway."

"Why ? " asked Loveday, in almost a whisper.

"'Cause a sick w——" He stopped, coughed, and shuffled his feet, as he continued rapidly : "A sick woman ain't no use to herself nor nobody else."

There was another long pause.

"Pilchard shoal in the bay ! " cried Tobias.

They both looked out to sea, and stopped to watch the little boats.

"Tasty fish," said Tobias.

"I dearly love 'em," said Loveday, with animation.

"A real savour," said Tobias briskly.
"Wi' vinegar and watercress," said Loveday.
"Never tried the watercress dodge," said Tobias.
"It's prime," said Loveday.
Tobias turned to face the girl, and then suddenly hung his head.
"What was you going to say?" said Loveday indifferently.
Tobias spat on the ground nervously. "It's nice to have tastes alike," he jerked out.
"Everybody likes pilchards," said Loveday slyly.
They walked on in silence for some time.
"Shall we sit down?" said Loveday.
"Thankful to, I'm sure," said Tobias; "these boots be a murderin' of me."
Loveday laughed as she said: "You'm real swell," and she looked up into his face.
Tobias blushed to the roots of his hair as he muttered: "Like me, do you?"
"Of course," said Loveday. "You'm a reg'lar mash."
Tobias fumbled for his pipe.
"Object?" he queried hurriedly, as he rammed tobacco into the bowl.
Loveday shook her head, and said slyly: "Men loves their 'baccy better nor anythin' i' the world."
Tobias struck a match sharply on his boot, and drew long, quick pulls before he spoke. Then he said shortly: "No, they don't."
Loveday edged a little nearer to Tobias as she said, emphatically: "Iss, I've heard 'em say so."
"Then it's lies," said Tobias.

"Oh!" exclaimed Loveday. "How dreadful!"
"What?" asked Tobias.
"To say what you don't mean," said Loveday.
Tobias frowned.
"Do girls allus tell true?" he asked.
"Oh! Iss! nearly always," said Loveday confidently.
"Why be you walkin' out wi' me to-night?" suddenly snapped Tobias.
Loveday jerked back to her former position on the grass.
Tobias watched her with keen eyes as he drew at his pipe. "Say!" he insisted, as she did not answer.
"I likes fresh air," said Loveday gently.
"Hang air," said Tobias sullenly; "don't 'e like nothin' else?"
"Iss!" said Loveday.
"What?" queried Tobias eagerly.
"Sittin' on the grass, watching the pilchard boats," said Loveday, quietly.
Tobias knocked the bowl of his pipe against the toe of his boot as he muttered: "You're having me on." Then, as he saw her scared and inquiring look, he murmured: "You'm real takin'."
Loveday tossed her head, as she said with a pout: "Saucy manners wi' you, sure enough, Mr Olds."
"Mr be hanged; drop it, Loveday!"
She gave a little scream, and jumped up as she said: "It's gettin' late, and we'd better be goin'."
Tobias stood by her side as he said slowly: "I'm i' dead earnest."

"And I'm tired," said Loveday, as she came closer to the man's side.
"Let me carry you," said Tobias, under his breath; "you're only a feather's weight."
"You'm forthy and silly," said Loveday, with her head lowered.
"Nothin' seems to matter but one thing," said Tobias.
"What's that?" asked Loveday, with a defiant little smile.
"You'm cold," Tobias said quickly; "you'm shiverin'. Here, take my coat," and he began to pull his jacket off.
"Silly Billy!" said Loveday, "to think I'd be seen wearin' a chap's coat."
"Cuddle up to me, then," said Tobias softly.
For answer Loveday went further away and walked quickly towards her home.
"Vexed?" queried Tobias.
"Iss!" murmured Loveday, in a frightened voice.
Tobias came close to the girl's side and whispered, "Give us one," and he caught her arm. Loveday gave a little scream and began to run, but Tobias kept hold of her still as he said, "You'm mazin' me," and his breath came quickly as he added, "No girl's ever had the chance afore."
"Oh! let me go, do!" cried Loveday breathlessly. "I—I—I—don't—don't want to be kissed a bit," and she put her hands over her face as she added: "It's truth. I never thought of such a thing."
They were at her door, and her hand was on the knob.

Tobias, with a white, tired face, wrenched her out into the street by the arm, as he said harshly: "Like it or not, it's got to be." Loveday fell into his arms. "There!" he said, as he let her go, with a deep sigh: "A second chap can't never do no better nor that, and I'll bung his eyes in if he tries."

Loveday was leaning against the little cottage wall and crying piteously. Tobias jerked her hands from her face, as he said boldly: "Look up, girl! Face your sweetheart!"

She smiled shyly out of her tears as she sobbed out: "You'll—you'll—never want me no more now—never! I know that, but—but—it was not me at all—it was all you."

"Iss!" said Tobias, "and it's to go on for ever and ever, mind."

The girl looked up at Tobias.

"You'm grown into a real big chap," she said feebly. "I've never noticed till now," and she put up her little tear-stained face to his.

"Thanks be to God as made men and maids," said Tobias, as he kissed her again.

UNDER CONVICTION

"PLEASE, missis, will you come and speak to John James; he've forgot the firewood, turned the bucket over when he was milkin', and has a wanderin' look!" The little maid flicked her duster against the wall to remove a stray cobweb, and added on her own account: "It's a pity men 'as such chancy ways. I cannot abear them myself and 'ate them round the house."

I laughed as I said:

"I'll be down in a moment. Where is John?"

"In the stable," Maria Jane answered.

I slipped on my hat and went out to interview my farm hand. He had been in my service for some time, and I was not alarmed at the statement of the little maid in whose eyes he found no favour.

"Good morning, John," I said, as I saw the man I wanted standing in the doorway of the cowshed. As there was no answer I looked sharply into his face. It was a very white face. The previous night John James had seemed well, and his whistle had persistently irritated my nerves until he had left work. I was puzzled.

"Good morning, John," I repeated emphatically. He did not answer, but fixed his eyes on my face and smiled. Then he moved towards me.

"Shake hands, missis," he said in a broken voice.

My worst fears were getting confirmed. He seemed to have been drinking or to be in some bad trouble. The man had completely altered from the vigorous worker of the day before. I thought it wiser to humour him, so I shook his hand, silently.

"God bless you," he said solemnly.

I waited for something further which might explain his strange conduct.

"And you'll come too?" he asked.

The situation was getting very puzzling. I glanced towards the yard and replied mechanically: "Where to, John?"

"Christ!" was all he answered, and his eyes never left my face.

I wondered whether it would be best to laugh or to be severe, and so bring him to his senses. I had little time to think. John James stood before me with clasped hands, and his white lips trembled as he almost sang out the words:

"Missis, I'm saved!"

It was ridiculous not to be able to respond to this clarion note of joy, but I could do nothing but stand and stare as I realised how the man had become transformed. His body seemed to have shrunk and his muscles become limp. I did not speak; I simply continued staring.

He again broke the silence.

"I'm under conviction, missis," he said, and his eyes glittered.

"So am I, I think," I at last found voice to answer. "I'm pretty well convinced that to pay a man a pound a week to do his work badly is a mistake."

He smiled.

"It's only this mornin'," he said; "I'll make up for it. I couldn't see nor hear for joy. Millions of voices in my ears, and gladness in my heart made me feel caught up, in a manner of speaking. I've never slept at all for the night, only prayed wi' thanksgiving; but," and a look of regret passed over his face, "I couldn't cry to save my head."

"Is that necessary?" I asked.

"Iss!" he answered seriously. "Everyone in the chapel last night as was saved cried a stream, and my poor evil heart was that hard I could not shed a tear. Oh!" he went on, and a brighter look came into his face, "you should 'ave seen them all. Enemies jumpin' over chairs to get to one another quicker so as to be friends again; women as 'ad 'ated one another kissin' and cryin' all to onc'st; neighbours shoutin' wi' praise and joy! Oh! it was a grand sight, and they was all drawn i' the fold like herrin' in a net," and he clapped his hands and looked up at the stable beams over his head.

"I'll give you the afternoon to go to your football," I said; "you need it badly."

For answer he pointed solemnly into the yard. There, on a clothes' line, dangling like tiger skins,

out of which the wild beast had been cruelly wrenched, were the symbols of a game which I had always encouraged because of the pluck it put into the man. I looked at him now, and his smug smile irritated me. I pointed to the yellow and black jersey swinging in the wind.

"Why are those football clothes there?" I asked.

"For a testimony," he answered.

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

He bent his head and said in a half whisper:

"No dallyin' in the paths of sin now, no joinin' those who curse and fight and bet and smoke. I'm the Lord's elect and must be a shinin' light to all."

I looked at the man and said:

"Clean your stable and take in wood to the girls, or I shall give you notice."

For answer he smiled at me as he said:

"You'm a black-hearted woman yet, missis, but I shall change all that by and by. I shall pray for you three times a day, and the prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

I turned my back on John James, went into the house and sat at my open study window. The smell of the gorse after the rain, the twittering and carolling of the birds getting ready for the work and play of spring love, the scent of the wet earth with the primroses peeping out, as if to abash the shy white violets, almost hidden beneath their leaves, soon restored my irritated nerves. The whole of nature, after all, was "under conviction," too. Why should I be irritated with the man groping towards light while the things in nature,

bursting joyously out towards the sun, calmed and comforted me? The blue sea, the bluer sky, the basking of my cat in the garden, luxuriously sunning herself with her head twisted in between her two front paws, coying with the sunlight, gave me some of the inner peace John James imagined he had had bequeathed to him as a personal legacy. In the field opposite, my little thick-coated donkey, alternately biting his mother's legs and then sucking her milk, hitting her hard with his rough little head in the process, brought some of the tenderness into my heart the women "under conviction" must have felt when they became reconciled after long separation. Harmony seemed to be evolving out of discord in all the sights under my window, and I became soothed and softened. The blackbird opposite called out its spring message, and I felt, suddenly, quite lenient to the songster's brother, John James, who had such a grotesque way of proclaiming his April mood. I was meditating a return to the stable to say a gentler word to him, when Maria Jane hastily knocked at the door, and entered my room with a flushed and angry face.

"Missis, John James be took worse nor ever; he be silly crazy, sure enough," she said.

"What is the matter now?" I asked.

"He says he've heard a voice while he were milking the cow," she answered, "and that's why he've upset the milk."

"A voice?" I queried.

"Iss, missis!" The little maid blushed as she

continued: "He says it were the voice of God, and it sat in judgment on all o' we, and mostly on you."

I smiled into the anxious face of Maria Jane, and my big black retriever sat on her haunches, and, with a scared look in her eyes, lifted her paw on to my knee.

The little maid looked worried as she went on:

"He says he's had a g'eat illumination and can see things we can't nohow, and the sows isn't fed yet, and nothin' done outside, and he's terrifyin' we in the kitchen wi' his strange talk."

"Send him to me," I said with a sigh.

Maria Jane left the room, and I looked out of the window for renewed calm in order to face the situation.

In answer to my "Come in," John James stood before me. I looked sharply at him and said:

"Why don't you come to your senses, John, and do your work? There will be time enough after five o'clock for your converting."

"Now is the appointed time," answered John James.

"Tut!" I ejaculated crossly. "I simply can't stand any more of it; you will go mad with it all if you are not careful. Go and feed the pigs at once."

"Poor missis!" he said in a low voice. "To think that when I'm in heaven and you are in hell I shan't even be left to moisten your tongue wi' three drops o' water." He sighed as he added: "So far is the unjust put from the just, that I shan't

even want to leave the throne to minister to you then."

"Poor John James!" I muttered, "if you are so stupid I shall have to part with you. I will not have the maids disturbed and frightened, and I cannot afford to pay a man to preach to me instead of doing my work, so you must promise me not to behave like this again."

I walked over to the window and looked out. John James followed me and said in a measured drawl:

"You can gibe and jeer and send me forth, missis, but I do knaw what I do knaw, and it is all against your eternal soul. I've been told," and he looked at me as men look at their dead, "that the devil will never tempt you in this world again."

"I'm glad of that," I said, "but I fear what you have heard is too good to be true."

"No!" he said solemnly. "The devil will never come nigh you again until your dying hour."

"Why?" I asked curiously.

John James walked away from me, and his finger pointing at me added emphasis to his words as he said:

"Because he's sure of you, that's why, and the call will come some day when you're least thinking of it."

A voice under my window prevented an immediate answer. A man dressed in black, except for a clerical tie, replied to my inquiry as to what his business was by saying he had come to enrol a

shining light in his preaching van, which went from place to place converting sinners. My useless farm hand had evidently made his mark.

"The first call from a gentleman in black is for you, John James," I said, as I pointed towards the door.

MRS PENGILLY IN LONDON

I

"Lor! my dear!" said Mrs Pengilly to me one fine morning in June. "You don't mean to say you're going to leave all o' we for months to live i' London again?"

"Yes," I said, "important business has to be seen after, and go I must, but I hope only for a few weeks."

Mrs Pengilly sighed and looked at me out of the corner of her eye as she said:

"Bein' so bold, is it a g'eat expense to go to London?"

"Not so very much," I said.

"Oh!" she gasped, "me and Charlotte there," pointing to her daughter, "be fair longin' to go some day. Should us get lost, think you?"

"Come while I am there," I said; "you will be most welcome."

Mrs Pengilly sat down, and her face flushed suddenly as she said:

"Lor! my dear woman! that would be too good to be true."

"No!" I answered. "Come whenever you like. I go to-morrow, and I'll leave you my address and I shall expect you."

"This day week, if you please," said Mrs Pengilly. "I've made a particular practise never to delay a benefit, and this be almost like a miracle," she ended joyously.

Charlotte looked up from her ironing and said slowly:

"It'll never be, mother. There's some things too good to be true, so don't let us dwell on it at all."

"A week to-day I shall expect you," I said, smiling.

"Lor! to be sure!" said Mrs Pengilly. "It'll mind me of gettin' ready to be married, finery and all, and it do surely need no braver heart to start on a journey than to begin i' matrimony. It's all fearsome and unbeknowns anyway, in a manner of speakin'."

As I went out of the door I said:

"It is quite a comfort to me to think that I shall so soon see some of my neighbours again, so don't disappoint me, for I'll leave you all directions to-night."

"We won't fail you for a world," said Mrs Pengilly, as she shook my hand. "I shan't get no proper sleep till I'm on my way. Who'd 'ave thought when I made the beds this morning, that before evening I should be plannin' what I've dwelt on and reckoned with for years," and her eyes shone as she closed the door after me.

II

"Lord! have mercy on we!" exclaimed Mrs Pengilly, as she and her daughter jumped out of a third-class railway carriage at Paddington, a week later. "I'm some thankful to see 'e, sure enough, for me and Charlotte there have been almost murdered i' the full light o' day."

"Whatever has happened?" I asked, as I shook hands with the trembling pair.

The tears ran down Mrs Pengilly's cheeks, and even a few of the bustling crowd turned in surprise to see such a bovine face convulsed with hysterical crying. She looked such a pitiable object. Her old-fashioned silk pelisse had got twisted almost off her shoulders, and her new black bonnet with its gaudy red poppies had slipped to the back of her head. She seemed indeed a woman who had fallen on some evil chance.

"It were Jack the Ripper, I'm sure," she mumbled, "as were in the train wi' Charlotte an' me. He'd a dreadful black bag by his side, and for miles and miles he never took the g'eat eyes of 'en off of we. He made a pretence now and again to read his paper, but behind it we could see him peerin', and we held on to the cushions for dear life, and we scarcely dare breathe, much less speak the one to the other." She ended with a loud sob.

"By your leave," from a porter, made Mrs Pengilly jump as if she had been shot. She wailed out:

"Oh! I thought that were his voice, sure enough," and she caught her daughter's hand in frantic terror. The poor girl looked as if her eyes would drop out of her head as she answered:

"Ma! why did us come to this noisome, bewilderin' place?"

As the two women clung together I pointed out to a porter the carriage they had come from, and told him to take the luggage to a hansom. The man's face was a picture as he emerged with two large carpet bags, one being maroon and yellow and the other orange and red in colour.

"They'm very small," said Mrs Pengilly apologetically, "but I did not bring many clothes for a week's stay, and, as it were the first time she and me have ever been in a train, we were afraid to trust our things in the van wi' other people's truck."

I hailed a hansom, and the porter, with a wink at the cabby, flung the bags on to the top of the cab. The mother and daughter looked at one another in dismay.

"Lor! enough to send 'em all abroad!" Mrs Pengilly exclaimed.

The porter and I assisted the trembling woman into the cab, and as she sat down she held her arms frantically open lest her daughter should be left behind on the platform. I jumped in and literally sat down upon both these children of the soil and tried to reassure them. The perspiration poured from Mrs Pengilly's face as she convulsively whispered to her daughter:

'Oh! if only I'd left off that felt under skirt wi' all the pockets sewn in it, my dear, I should not feel so overcome with the heat; but then," sinking back with a sigh, "he might have picked all the outer pockets, so perhaps the under ones have been the savin' of we."

Just as I thought all was well at last, a scream pierced my ear from the tormented woman at my side, and Charlotte pinched my arm as she clung in terror to my skirts.

"Lord! have mercy on we!" yelled Mrs Pengilly. "He've got on the top of this conveyance, sure enough, and—oh! my dear life! look at the awful eye of him!"

The impatient cabman, peering through the hole at the top of his hansom, gave a grunt of disgust, being quite unprepared for the savage upward poke of Mrs Pengilly's umbrella in his face. He banged down the shutter and I got up and stood in the front of the cab, and explained that the ladies were strangers and very nervous, and that he was to drive slowly to our destination. In answer he jerked his thumb at the carpet bags and growled:

"Noah's ark party, I should say!"

Mrs Pengilly's astonishment at the crowded streets and vehicles expressed itself at intervals in short gasps and exclamations. As we passed a line of hansoms she turned to her daughter and said:

"Lor! they do tend their cattle fine here. They must eat a power o' oats to get the coats of 'em shiny like that."

Charlotte remained speechless for some time, and at last she said in a low voice :

"I'd never a notion there were so many people reared in safety in London. But I suppose you never know what may befall you any minute. I told ma, afore we left, we ought to have our photos took, for there's no knowin' if we should ever get home again."

Mrs Pengilly's face was more serious than ever as she adjusted her black pelisse before speaking.

"It do give me grave thoughts o' the Resurrection when I look round," she at last said. "How can there be room i' heaven for us all, and how could I ever find my little John as died in a crowd like this 'ere?"

"Nothing is impossible," I said, as I looked into the troubled face of the woman near me. After this we all sat in silence until we reached our destination. The first thing they asked for was a drink. I opened a bottle of sparkling water, and offered it to Mrs Pengilly. She drank it quickly, and, to my surprise, put down the glass with a shudder.

"Whatever is it, ma?" asked her daughter in surprise.

"Lor!" wailed Mrs Pengilly, "whatever sort of place 'ave we dropped on at all? The very water pricks like needles and pins."

Charlotte carefully sipped the dangerous fluid, and said :

"Mercy me!"

"Do the place allus sing song i' your ears like

this?" asked Mrs Pengilly suddenly. "I've a buzzin' in my head most ever since I got out o' the train, and the murders we've heard on so much must be goin' on constant by the loud cries I keep hearing. I shall never dare to walk abroad i' this place even in full daylight, so I shan't see no sights, I'm fearin'."

"A good supper and a sleep will give you fresh courage," I said; "and to-morrow I'll take you about."

"Deary me!" ejaculated Mrs Pengilly, after supper was over, "to think of people livin' all their natural lives i' clouds o' furnace smoke and screams, when the blue sea and green fields be lyin' waste, in a manner o' speakin'. I'd give my life to see the yellow cream on my milk pans i' my dairy now. It were just whitewashed afore I come away," she added wistfully. "It's like thinkin' o' heaven to picture it so quiet and cool and peaceful."

"Don't, ma!" cried Charlotte, with the tears starting into her eyes; "I shan't never be able to undress for longin', if you say any more."

III

Mrs Pengilly had attained the ambition of her life. She was in London, and as she got out of bed the next morning in the little room I had chosen for her in my small flat, she felt a distinct feeling of elation. When I went into

her bedroom to see how she had slept, I found her full of excitement. In spite of the exhaustion after her journey, the unknown outside my windows made her eagerly draw aside the curtains, in order to get a glimpse of the great roaring city. She turned towards her daughter with a little cry of surprise.

"Charlotte, my dear," she said eagerly. "Get up to onc'st. I've heard there are no trees i' London, and here's one at our very door. Do go out as soon as you are dressed, and pick a few leaves, and we'll send 'em this very day to Mary Jane, for it must be a special thing to find trees here."

"Lor, ma!" responded Charlotte, from under the bedclothes, "I'm that tired I could die, and the buzzin' and roarin' i' my ears all night 'ave driven me silly crazy. It's worse nor a thousand hobby-horses at Polcoath Fair."

She slowly got out of bed, and did her mother's bidding, and the two women crooned over their discovery of sooty leaves from a London garden, as strangers in their land glory in the wonders of yellow gorse and daffodils.

After breakfast we all began to plan the best way to see London.

"Statutes is what I've wanted to see more nor anythin'," said Mrs Pengilly.

"And me the Zoo," said Charlotte.

"Wild beasts of a sort you can see in your own fields," said Mrs Pengilly, "but statutes be part of a g'eat city, I'm told."

"Let us get ready," I said, "and you shall see all you want, but I must let you go to some sights alone to-morrow, as I shall be busy."

"Statutes to-morrow!" said Mrs Pengilly joyfully; "my eyes fair long to see 'em i' all their loveliness.

"I've promised they at home," said Mrs Pengilly, when we were ready to start, "to keep a book of all the grand sights I see, and so we'll take it with us."

Armed with three well-pointed pencils and a thick account book, Mrs Pengilly, revived by her sleep and breakfast, beamed upon me.

"It be a gran' thing to travel," she said. "I feel already that it don't matter so very much even if Mary Jane do burn the cream i' scaldin' it, or John Thomas don't water the horses quite reg'lar. Frettin' over they little things do sometimes give me a sick stomach, and I shain't do it no more. It don't never alter nothin' to keep hollerin' about it, after all."

With this dissertation we made our way towards Chancery Lane. I hailed an omnibus, and we scrambled to the top.

"Lor, my dear! I'm most shamed at what I've done!" said Mrs Pengilly. "It shows how new notions get hold of a body. I wouldn't be paid to go as high as a haycart at home to show my ankles like that," and she wiped her flushed face.

"Ain't it some grand, Charlotte?" she asked her daughter. "Look at the millions of folks, and see

what a pace they go at. Jacob 'ud take a fear to see anyone walk over the roads like that there. It's most like flyin', and they all seem as if they was hurryin' to a deathbed or a confinement, wi' that eager, tormented look i' their faces."

Out of respect to the susceptibilities of our fellow-passengers, I whispered gently :

"Let us speak softly, as people can hear all we say."

My remark was unheeded, perhaps unheard. With a cry of joy Mrs Pengilly had clasped her daughter's arm, and, pointing to several flower girls at the corner of Gray's Inn Road, she said eagerly :

"Sakes, Charlotte ! Do look at they lovely flowers ! Penny posies for the bosom, sure enough ! "

This enthusiastic exclamation had made its mark. Every passenger on the top of the omnibus twisted round, or bent forward, to look into the face of Mrs Pengilly, who, at last realising the attention she had called upon us, drew herself up and exclaimed in a severe voice :

"Mercy me ! how very forthy the London men are ! " She then planted her umbrella firmly between her knees, folded her two large hands over the handle, and looked up at the sky.

"P'licemen seem to be most everywhere," said Mrs Pengilly suddenly. "You'd think they was posted along the roads for ornament, the way they stand, and such g'eat, tall fellers, too."

"Lor, ma ! " cried Charlotte, "whatever be they ? " A long line of sandwich men had caught her eye.

"Gosh!" continued Charlotte. "Perhaps they wear they boards to straighten their backs." She turned to me. "If they do it for their health, it don't seem to cure 'em, for they all look whisht, don't they?"

I explained that they were men who had to do this, because it was the only work they could find, and that probably they looked "whisht," as they had not had a square meal for weeks.

"Lor!" said Mrs Pengilly. "Better they carted manure on a farm place, or anything but that. It do make me giddy to watch that line o' boards swayin' from side to side, wi' only an empty stomach, in a manner of speaking, keepin' them from touchin' one another. It's pitiable," and she wiped her eyes. "Just think of the g'eat pasty Jacob belongs to eat after ploughing, and the way he folds his arms and stretches out his legs and smokes. He's tired, of course, but full o' flesh meat and contentment. Think upon that, and then of how those starved dears be feelin', crawling along in the heat," and she pointed to the long disappearing line in the distance.

"The children here looks all in a decline," said Charlotte, pointing to a white little maid just entering a tavern with a jug.

"All people who live long here grow pale," I explained.

"Mercy me!" said Mrs Pengilly. "Livin' amongst beautiful sights and gettin' a power o' book learnin' ain't the things, seemly, to build up a constitootion wi'."

"Here we are at the Bank, so we must get down," I said.

"This is where all the money is made, Charlotte," said Mrs Pengilly to her daughter, in a solemn whisper. "Think of that!"

"It do seem more like a church to look at it," said Charlotte.

"So it do," said Mrs Pengilly, "and you might almost fancy that crowd goin' in be worshippers."

I pulled the excited woman from under a horse's nose, and she stood and looked at the animal with great admiration, as she said:

"The very cattle here do seem to know more than some Christians along o' we. What a grand sight the Zoo must be!"

"We will have lunch, and if it is fine we will go this afternoon," I said.

"Charlotte's treat, that," said Mrs Pengilly, "and the statutes to-morrow!"

"Yes, without fail," I said.

IV

I was resting after a long day of exertion. Showing my guest, Mrs Pengilly, over London, was more exhausting than I had expected. Her continual appeal to see "statutes" had given me the excuse I wanted in order to return to my home. We had spent the morning looking over St Paul's, so after lunch I put Mrs Pengilly and her daughter in charge of an omnibus conductor, and told him to

put them down at Mudie's, having given the two women minute directions how to find the British Museum.

"Come in," I said, startled out of my half doze by a knock at the door. Mrs Pengilly and Charlotte appeared before me and sank into chairs.

"Oh! my dear life!" exclaimed the exhausted woman, "my legs is fair bustin' and my inside be all of a shake. I could scream wi' weariness."

Charlotte was actually crying, and only muttered between her sobs:

"My back is tore abroad and my feet's i' blisters."

"Wherever have you been?" I asked anxiously.

Mrs Pengilly produced her notebook and showed me pages of large writing.

"Ma have fair wrote a book," said Charlotte.

"How did you like the statues?" I asked.

Mrs Pengilly's face radiated at last, and she took off her bonnet, and carefully rolled up the strings. Then she pulled off her gloves, and drew out the fingers, blowing into them one by one, still smiling at her happy memories.

"Too wonderful for words, I reckon," she said at last. "Charlotte and me was a long time findin' any statutes at all, for I'm sure that sniggering 'busman as you told to put we out mistook the place, or did it to fluster we. When we got down we saw nothin' but books in a quiet street wi' a building like a large church at the end. We were afraid to ask people, for they seemed in such a hurry, and looked so sour and unfriendly, so we walked on a bit, looking about at the shops, and by

a bit of good luck we hopped on the statutes to onc'st."

"They did not disappoint you at all?" I asked, a little amused at her instinctive good taste in works of art. The bovine face turned towards me, and her eyes were bright and happy as she answered:

"I'll never forget they so long as I do live. Like life itself, sure enough. Even the top boots and gloves were as natural as natural."

I started.

"Top boots?" I queried.

"Why! Iss!" and she turned towards Charlotte to confirm her statement.

"Yes," said Charlotte wearily. "Ma were some took with they costumes, for she'd heard that statues were mostly naked, but she couldn't help thinking how handsome Jacob would be in one set o' clothes a dark, tall feller had on. He were dressed in black velvet and a lovely white waistcoat and tie. He were so natural he'd actually his hand stretched out as if he was speaking to you."

Where had they been? What could they have seen? Had they walked miles and reached Madame Tussaud's?

"Did you pay to see these statues?" I asked.

"No, my dear; that is the wonderful part of it. There"—handing me the large notebook—"I put down the name over the group we saw to tell 'em at home, though what it do mean I don't know."

I took the book Mrs Pengilly handed to me and read the name of a large Holborn tailor.

"Get water to onc'st, Charlotte," cried Mrs

Pengilly, as she patted my back. "Whatever have took 'e so sudden? I used to be took like that pretty often when I were left with the chronic in my windpipe after influenza."

"It is nothing," I said, and then added: "I'm glad you found just what you liked."

"I wouldn't 'ave missed they for a world," said Mrs Pengilly, patting her notebook. "Charlotte and me stood so long admiring they, that we got real footsore, and we walked back to where we'd started and saw the church I spoke of just now. We thought we'd see if it was open; so we went up to the doors, and as we saw the people going in, we followed them; but it weren't no church at all. It were a queer, old-fashioned sort o' place, wi' solemn churchwardens about everywhere carryin' long cane poles, like fishin' rods. I whispered to Charlotte to watch if one particular one should follow we, but he didn't; he only walked wearily about like one in a sleep. Charlotte and me were thankful to sit on the benches which seemed to be provided free."

"Did you see any statues?" I asked, grasping at once that they had found the British Museum by mistake.

"No, nothing to speak of," said Mrs Pengilly. "We saw some half-made figures, some without legs or arms, and some even without heads, and some were quite unwholesome and shameful to look upon." She glanced sideways at Charlotte. "No place really to take a young girl to, for it even gave me queer qualms, as if I'd looked upon something I shouldn't see at all. Anyway, they wasn't life-

like a bit. Those that looked most like we belong to look had something wrong with them, but I was glad of the rest, anyway," ended Mrs Pengilly, with a sigh.

"Some folkses liked they figures," said Charlotte, "for there was a' artis' chap, like as comes down along o' we sometimes, takin' off one lady wi' scarce a rag on she, and he kept smilin' quite friendly at ma and me."

"Well, I'm truly thankful I saw the real statutes," said Mrs Pengilly. "I've heard so much of 'em, and it was the thought of seein' them that half persuaded me to come to London at all. They'm certainly far more splendid than I thought they were."

"You will be able to see plenty of those," I said, looking into the face of the woman who had found her ideal. "I rather envy you your enjoyment of them. I've lived here too long to care for them."

"Lor!" she said sympathetically, "that's a miserable state to get to. It's how I feel sometimes about primroses and hollyhocks, and even my dairy, wi' all its g'eat shining pans, what I takes such a pride in, and what uplong people think so lovely. I'm used to 'em, you see, and can't see nothin' in 'em at all, after a bit."

We all three sighed.

Mrs Pengilly's excursions into the heart of London had tired me more than they had her. The continual answering of questions which followed one another in an inconsequence only to be met with in like form in "A Child's Guide to

Knowledge," added to continual journeys on foot, rail, or omnibus, had set up a severe nervous headache on the fourth day after her arrival, and I had retired to my bed early with the hope that nothing would disturb me till late the next morning. My little maid had received these instructions with anything but a serene face.

"If Mrs Pengilly should want to see you very much?" she queried.

"Tell her I'm quite ill," I said, as I went into my peaceful room.

A long, dreamless sleep did its work, but I was awakened by one of the worst thunderstorms I had ever heard. Flash on flash of lightning, followed by terrific peals of thunder, made the grey dawn seem more terrible than midnight. I covered my head with the bedclothes; but I suddenly heard, combined with the noise of the elements outside, another tragic sound. There was evidently a fire across the road. I leaped out of bed, and saw three fire-engines at work. The play of the lightning, the shouts of the men, the hissing of the water, and the roars of thunder made a scene not easily forgotten. I got back into bed, and as I did so I heard a violent knock at my door.

"Please, mam, the lady has gone mad," shouted my maid.

"Come in," I said in dismay, and, capless and apronless, my ordinarily demure little attendant rushed in.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as she stood before me. "Do go to her. She's beside herself, and she

must be gone crazy, for when I went into the room, she had her head in her carpet bag."

I got up, put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and went to Mrs Pengilly's room. No answer greeted my repeated knocking, so I opened the door and walked in. Mrs Pengilly and her daughter were both dressed, and were clasped in each other's arms—at least, they would have been if their arms had not been otherwise employed, for their hands were over their eyes, and only their bodies clung together in abject terror. When at last they saw me, they separated and rushed towards me, holding me by the skirts.

"It's the Day of Judgment," yelled Mrs Pengilly, "and, oh! my family, my family!"

Charlotte blurted out between chattering teeth: "Men wi' gold head-pieces and g'eat ladders be tryin' to stop the elements, and oh!" with a wail, "they cain't do nothin' at all. The very earth seems on fire, and see"—with a new realisation of the awful situation—"the smoke's got in here, and listen, listen! Whatever s'all us do, what s'all us do?"

The terrific noise outside made it almost impossible for my voice to be heard, but I tried to explain that all would be well in a little while. A great flash of lightning, followed instantly by ear-splitting thunder, seemed to give the lie to my words. Mrs Pengilly sank on to the bed, and covered her face with her hands. Her long, grey hair hung over her shoulders, and her open carpet bag was at her feet. She dropped her hands into her lap at last.

"I've packed 'en," she said, pointing to the bag at her feet, "but I don't believe we shall ever go forth from this alive, and in our rightful senses. I'm not exactly even now, and never shall be again."

I assured her all would soon be well, but each shout from below and each roar of thunder agitated her more than ever. Suddenly, as if a miracle had happened, all the noises ceased. The fire engines had done their work and gone, and the storm was over. The rain was coming down in torrents, but almost noiselessly in its intensity. The soft twitter of a sparrow now and again was soon the only sound we heard. Mrs Pengilly's sobs gradually ceased, and Charlotte's teeth stopped chattering. We all three looked at one another and tried to smile.

"It's a lesson," said Mrs Pengilly.

I waited to hear more.

"If such a terrifyin' and unbeknowns thing as that can come on us afore we are aware, what could happen at midnight in an evil city like this 'ere? I feel we are in a worse place than the preacher warns we of when he tells us of Sodom of long ago. It's a judgment for our sins, and I'm goin' home to onc'st."

"No!" I said, "don't do that, but stay your week out."

"Not an hour more, my dear," she said gravely. "Thank you kindly all the same, but it could never be. The thought of the little garden at home, wi' all the pansies and roses in it, 'ave almost

choked me wi' longin', even in the midst of this horrible disaster of smoke and sulphur and heart-rendin' sounds. I'll risk no more visitations, but get home," and she stooped to lift the carpet bag on to the bed.

"I'd rather be transported than live here another day," said Charlotte.

"Well, we shall be home to-night," said Mrs Pengilly, with a happy smile.

"I don't believe we shall ever get home i' safety, mother," said Charlotte, in a hard voice. "We're ill-whisht, I tell 'e ; we've that awful journey yet," and the two women's eyes grew nervous as they thought of it.

"I will see to that," I said, "and put you in the guard's care."

Mrs Pengilly shook her head as she answered :

"Guards be Londoners mostly, too. Nothing but an assurance that we are in God's hands can fortify we after all we've passed through."

I helped them to pack, and gave orders for their breakfast and cab, and as they stood in my little sitting-room before leaving, I noticed that Mrs Pengilly had aged considerably, and her hair had grown much greyer.

"The thoughts of this week will never leave me," said Mrs Pengilly sorrowfully. "It 'ave fair ransacked me, inside and out, and I can't believe I shall ever put on my big apron again to make butter with a peaceful mind, and as for ever being real clean again, it can't be possible, for the soot must have got right into my very skin."

"It 'ave cured me of a longin' ever to move from my own doorstep," said Charlotte.

I sighed as I said:

"And I, too, long to be back in the quiet country, and I shall hurry through my work and start as soon as possible."

"Good-bye, my dear," said Mrs Pengilly, as the cab was announced. "How you keep medium decent is a puzzle to me in a place seem'ly like hell itself, wi' ravening wolves around 'e, and God's peace and light never in evidence at all. It's a heart-rendin' way of livin', and not suitable to they who have their immortal souls to save."

AN ARTIST

"Good mornin', missis. I'm rare and glad to see you back in our pairts again. From all I hear you've had a bad spell of weather in London."

So spoke Ned Curtis as he looked up at my study window two or three mornings after my return.

"I'm glad to be back," I said; "this blue sea and sky suit me better than smoke and darkness."

Ned Curtis, with his head a little on one side, gazed at me with an affectionate smile as he said gently:

"Missis, do 'e for onc'st give a fellow a job and let me show 'e I do knaw what real work is. Now John James have gone I'd willingly take his place, for I do understand a power o' things to do with gardens and such like. You see," he went on, as he leaned his arms on the wall, "there's some can do more wi' looking at a thing if they understands what they'm looking at than others if they work till they sweat a stream. That's what folkses as isn't in the exact know over work can't rightly understand. Plannin' and schemin' be as good as toilin' and moilin', if you've a plain goal ahead. I've never tasted a crumble

since yesterday dinner time, and my woman ain't nothin' i' the world to go on with in the house."

"How is that?" I asked. "Why can't you get work?"

Ned shook his head solemnly and wiped an imaginary tear away with the end of his orange-coloured smock, and then blew his nose as he sighed deeply. Looking up at my window suddenly he said:

"There be folkses allowed to live and thrive, in a manner o' speakin', by stealin' the characters of their equals and betters. A gentleman once nearly took me on for a place like yours, light work and lots of 'sponsibility, and fur why do you think I lost the job?"

"I cannot imagine," I said.

"Some foul-mouthed gabbart as wanted the place hissel' told the gentleman never to take on no man as had patches in the elbows of his jumper, nor yet in the knees of his trousers." Ned affectionately patted the yellow squares on his orange-coloured smock, which testified to the careful mending of his clothes by his wife.

"What a strange idea!" I said. "But no one could have been influenced by such a silly thing as that."

"Iss! he were, sure enough!" dejectedly answered Ned, "for he gave a seemly reason, my enemy did. When a man's your neighbourly foe, so to speak, he don't pick and choose how he'll ruin you; he just goes for you anyway. That blackguard said as how every man what has patches on his

elbows and knees can't never be no use for hard work, for they gets wore, so he says, by the constant habit of leaning his elbows on his knees, or on walls or any comfortable resting-place. 'Lazy louts, all of them,' were the words he made use of to the gentleman. The place was got by a man wi' leggings and breeches and a tight coat as no reasonable man can move his limbs in. But there's comfort i' most things, and perhaps the loss o' that job were only a sort o' dispensation, so that I should be in readiness for a better place," and he fixed his blue eyes on my face.

"I've nothing to give you to do but some rough digging in my side garden," I said.

"Well! give me the job, anyway," he said, "for life's awful hard sometimes on some of we, missis, and we can't often get any flesh meat or even weddin' cake from one week to another."

"Wedding cake!" I said.

"Iss!" he mumbled, "allus a good take of fish means plenty of wedding cake for we folkses hereabouts, and we do dearly love it at all times. I had a mate once as made a habit, when he'd had a long spell of fishing and taken a good haul, of going to bed for two days and making his wife waken 'en reg'lar to feed 'en wi' strong tea and wedding cake, and when the cake were all done he'd get up a new man, ready to start fair again."

"Well!" I said, smiling, "if you want to earn some money for wedding cake you had better begin at once. I'll show you the work I want you to do."

I took him to a little side garden, gave him a spade, and told him to turn the earth in one particular corner. I then went back to my window, where I could see my new hireling as he worked, though he could not see me. I certainly saw him dig at least once in the two hours, as I carefully watched him from my window. He began by turning one spadeful of earth, and then he slowly spat, first on one hand and then on the other, letting the long spade rest against his chest. He manipulated invisible tobacco, at least so it seemed to me, as the process was long and almost rhythmic in its slow, monotonous, and circular movement between the palms of his hands. Then he slowly, so slowly that no mere word-painting can give any idea of the studied lethargy of the movement, removed the long spade from his chest, and lowered it on to the ground. That done, he, as slowly, put a hand on each hip, and seemed to be trying to rub the invisible tobacco from his palms with the same deliberation that he had placed it there; but the process was apparently more pleasurable, for it took much longer. That ended, he looked round, and then up at the sky, as if for inspiration, and at last seemed to be studying minutely every weed in my neglected garden, making mental comments thereon, for his lips moved; that I could see quite plainly from my window.

Then he settled himself in a comfortable sitting posture on the sloping bank near by. I watched him solemnly meditating on that bit of ground he had to turn until I laughed aloud, much to the

bewilderment of my little maid, who came in to ask if I had called for anything.

After a rest of about ten minutes, he caught the spade in a sort of splendid frenzy, and gave such a vigorous dig into the ground that his cap fell off. Down went the spade again before he picked up the cap, which had to be wiped slowly and carefully with his sleeve. There was then a readjustment of the cap altogether, its mishap in the mud necessitating a different indentation in the middle. When that was settled, a slow rubbing of the smock which had been used to clean the cap was essential, and, after all this exertion, a new rest and a new meditation seemed necessary, and finally a withdrawal from his pocket of the lunch, which evidently was the first bite since yesterday.

I watched him slowly pull asunder, bit by bit, half a very appetising pasty, and between each mouthful he ruminated on that piece of ground which bore a few inches of evidence that he was in very truth a working-man. I glanced at the clock. He had been there over an hour, and to my certain knowledge had turned only one shovelful of my garden. I was growing indignant, but curiosity held me still. Surely now, invigorated by his lunch, he would set at his task and finish it. I did not yet know my man. He fumbled in the inner folds of his orange-coloured smock, and, after a little time, produced a minute and very blackened clay pipe. The tobacco he first cut and rolled was real shag this time. After he had pressed it with vigour into the little pipe, a somewhat long search

ensued for a match, which was found at last in the paper in which his pasty had been wrapped, and the man, with folded arms, and still gazing at the work he had to do, smoked the pipe of great contentment. I could stand it no longer. I fled downstairs like a hare, and found my tortoise just knocking the ashes slowly out of his pipe, which, as he saw me, he slipped warily into his pocket. I went up to him and said very slowly :

"I shall put you in a book, my good man. Do you hear?"

He shifted his head, smiled at me, and once more blew his nose on his orange-coloured smock.

"In what book?" he drawled, with a pleasant smile still in his eyes and round his mouth.

"A book," I answered, "in which I mean to describe all kinds of artists, for I fancy you are one."

He got up slowly, took his long spade, and proudly patted the few inches of ground he had turned. He faced me, and looked straight into my eyes, with the smile growing on his face, and he said, in the tone of a devoted slave :

"There's few men hereabouts, to say nothin' of women folkses, missis, as could reckon up as you've done what a power o' real hard, sweatin' work do lie in doin' a job like this 'ere," and he pointed proudly to the newly-turned earth. "It's a heavy task, sure enough!"

GOATS

"Tobias, my son, whatever be wrang wi' thee? Thee has all the appearance of a man as 'ave lost a shilling and found a brass button."

Tobias Curnow hung his head, and slowly put his hands into his trousers' pockets. Then he jerked his head in a weary way towards a field on the left as he added:

"It's they goats as is frettin' me to skin and bone."

"For why?" asked Paul Rodda.

Tobias shook his head as he answered:

"'Cause they cling like the devil hissel'. I can't get rids of them no ways."

"Sell 'em," said Paul carelessly, as he filled his pipe.

A hard laugh was the answer.

"Why de 'e laugh?" asked Paul, as he pressed down his shag.

"'Cause I ain't a woman thing, and so don't go for to cry," snapped Tobias.

"Sakes!" ejaculated Paul. "Cry over goats! Why, a child would scarce do that!"

"Say you don't know," said Tobias slowly. "Two more were born last week, making six in all now."

"Quite a family," grinned Paul.

"Don't jeer," cried Tobias. "It's a real trial and no laughing matter at all. I took that g'eat stinking Billy there and his two wives for a bad debt, and I thought I'd got a bargain, sure enough, and now I've such evil thoughts over the man as handed them to me, I could most murder he. They've never done nothin' but devastate and ruin since they came, and as for sellin' 'em"—Tobias looked fiercely at his friend—"you might as well talk o' sellin' a teasy-tempered wife."

Paul frowned as he said curtly:

"Shoot 'em. It's allowable to kill animals as is in your way, and then you'll have them off your mind."

"I've bad luck enough," said Tobias. "I ain't goin' to risk shootin' anything as 'ave the mark o' the devil on 'em as clear as they trade 'ave."

"Give 'em away," said Paul.

Tobias found the heart to wink as he said:

"Only a circus 'ud take 'em, and there's none 'ere, and"—with a laugh—"I guess I'd find 'em near by when the show 'ad moved on."

"Goat's milk, what of that?" asked Paul.

"Ever tasted it?" asked Tobias.

"No," answered Paul.

"Never do," responded Tobias. "I once sold a quart to a dying child for sixpence, and the mother came later, and told me it had killed her daughter, and said she'd a mind to sue me."

"Use it fer the family in tea, and eat the kids," suggested Paul.

"You don't know what you're talking of," said Tobias. "No livin' stomach could stand more nor one meal of that."

"Get a cart and harness the brutes, and make 'em pay i' the season on the sands," said Paul suddenly. "That's a splendid plan."

Tobias smiled into his friend's eyes.

"Lor, son! have 'e never heard?"

"What?" asked Paul.

"How only a week ago we tried that game, and one goat pulled one way, and the other another, and the nurserymaid had high 'sterics over it, and the wheel came off, and at last we had to carry everythin' 'ome in a cart. In the scuffle the parties never paid me the hire, and I've never had the heart to go and ask for the money."

Paul Rodda turned towards the field where the goats were feeding, and leaned his elbows on the wall.

"Unbeknowns creatures, sure enough," he said, as he watched two kids leaping high in the air. The Billy stopped eating and looked at Paul with fear in his narrow, yellow eyes. Suddenly he raised his head, and showed his large teeth as he sniffed the air.

"Like Satan, sure enough," said Paul softly.

"So I should think," said Tobias.

"Do these goats belong to you?" The voice came from behind the two men.

Paul nudged Tobias, and said in a low voice:

"Hold thy noise." Then, turning to the newcomer, he said smilingly: "Iss, mam!"

"Pretty creatures!" said the lady. "All one family, I suppose?"

"Iss, mam!" answered Paul.

"Tame?" queried the daintily-dressed lady at Paul's side.

"Like lambs," answered Paul.

Tobias put his head in his hands and gazed at the goats.

"Charming pets for children," said the lady.

"First-rate!" heartily responded Paul.

"Have they ever been in harness?" she asked.

"Oh iss, mam! Me and my mate was just wonderin' if we could ever abear to lose sight of 'em, and sell 'em to the gentry for that purpose."

"How very curious!" said the lady.

Tobias gave a slight shudder. Paul put his hand on his friend's shoulder as he turned towards the newcomer and said:

"He be that 'tached to they dumb brutes, he do fair dread an offer for 'em."

"It was just what I was going to make," said the lady. "I heard you had goats, and I've come quite an hour by train to see them."

Tobias turned pale and fixed his eyes on Billy.

"He's the favourite!" said Paul.

"Well! Perhaps we could do without him," said the lady. "The two other big ones could pull the cart, and the little baby goats are really what I want the most to amuse the children."

"Billy 'ould only die without his wives and family," said Tobias in a choked voice.

"He couldn't separate 'em, mam, but he'll need a lot o' persuadin' to sell 'em at all, I fear," said Paul.

"I'd give you just what you think right in the way of money," said the lady, "and they would have a good home."

"Thank you," said Tobias brokenly, and he climbed the fence and went towards Billy. The goat gave a sharp cry and butted his head against his master's arm in an affectionate way. Tobias scratched the beast's neck and put his hand over the large horns. The gentle voice murmured: "How wonderfully tame and good-natured he seems; how the children will love him!"

Paul touched the lady's sleeve and beckoned her to one side. "Offer him five pounds down, and make him take you to his house near by and give you a receipt. He'm a fair misard over ready gold."

The prettily-dressed woman pulled out her purse and went to meet Tobias, who was getting over the wall.

"Will you take this for all the goats," she said, "and give me a receipt?"

Tobias stared at her stupidly, and muttered with lowered eyes:

"It ain't fair."

"I told you," said Paul hastily, "but another quid will probably do it—I mean, mam, another sovereign."

The lady opened her purse and said:

"I shall not give any more than this," and she placed the gold piece with the banknote on the wall. Tobias looked at the goats and then at the woman before him. "Be you rich?" he asked.

She blushed as she answered:

"Not rich enough to pay fancy prices, however much I want a thing."

Paul looked hard at Tobias, and said sternly:

"Don't be such a fool. Let 'em go, man. He'm fair crazy over they goats," he added.

The three wandered slowly to the house, and in a few minutes the prettily-dressed lady left and tripped towards the station with a beaming face.

"The devil in they goats 'ave got into we," said Tobias to Paul, as they watched her retreating figure.

LIGHTNING

"My head's like needles and pins," said Tobias Penberthy irritably. "I feel as if I've been flayed by a yard broom made wi' wire." He looked at Bob Olds and shook his head. Olds was a thick-set man, who sat comfortably in the corner of his fireplace smoking a little clay pipe.

"It was some dirty weather last night, sure enough," Olds replied stolidly, "but I rather likes the feelin' of bein' tucked in comfortable while the elements is roarin' outside. It ain't often as there's thunder, lightning, and hail all to onc'st."

"Thanks be!" said Tobias.

"We must take it as it comes," said a gentle-voiced woman who was knitting in the corner, and who raised her head now and again to catch what her husband and his friend were saying.

"We ain't no choice," said Bob.

"Lightnin's a fearsome thing," said Tobias.

"It's like fireworks to some," said Bob.

"It's like death to others," said Bob's wife.

"It was to the cat," said her husband, yawning.

"I've never seen no such things," he went on.

"The poor beast shook for hours wi' its tongue out, and panted as if it had run miles, its eyes dartin' out of its head like as if it was mad. The chintzycat, now, might have been born and reared i' claps o' thunder, the way she purred and lapped her milk."

"It's different dispositions," said Tobias.

"It's pluck," said Bob.

His wife's knitting needles flicked in the firelight as she said gently:

"Perhaps it's a voice to some, and nothin' but a noise to others."

Bob laughed. Tobias looked across at his friend's wife, and the two men puffed hard at their pipes. Bob at last got up, tapped on the stove to knock the ashes out of his pipe, and then stretched himself and clasped his big hands over his head.

"You can never reckon," he said, looking at his wife Grace, "what way women is going to take anything up." Then, jerking his thumb towards her, he added: "I sometimes think she's worse nor a play-actor for fancies."

The woman was counting stitches in the heel of her sock, and her lips moved. Tobias watched her for a few minutes and then glanced at Bob.

"She do keep a cozie home for thee, Bob, in spite of fancies," said Tobias, and he sighed as he spoke.

"I'd beat a woman as was a slut or a snap-tongue," said Bob.

Grace glanced at her husband, and Tobias sighed again.

"Thee may well sigh," said Bob roughly. "Thee's

never had no real go and pluck in thee since thy last dance at the Cat and Whistle. It was most the end of thee. Thy wife 'ave triumphed over thee now till thee do end or she do end i' the cemetery."

Tobias frowned as he said :

"You'm right, Bob, and a sudden storm like this 'ere do sometimes give me hope, for you never know when your turn may come. I knew a man once as took lightning as a sort o' friend, but that was 'cause it saved his life. I should reckon it mine if——"

Grace looked up suddenly and held her finger on one stitch so as not to forget her counting, and her face was pale as she spoke.

"A friend?" she said.

"Iss!" said Tobias.

"Tell about him," said Bob, and he stretched out his legs towards the blaze. The woman folded her thin hands over the sock she had laid in her lap.

"He were a man I knew quite well when I was a boy," Tobias began. "One night, out on the cliffs, he were overtaken wi' a storm like we had last night. It were pitch black, like ink, and the thunder and lightning seemed to fight one another to see which could do the worst. And then, sudden like, the lightning stopped, and the thunder too, and the hail came down like pebbles, so, though the man knew every inch of the cliff road, as he thought, he could not find the path before him. He got scared, and turned to the left, 'oping it would lead him out by the lane near his house."

Tobias cleared his throat, and coughed as he went on: "It allus gives me the crawls when I think upon what that chap went through that night, and I often start at the thoughts of it when I wake sudden like." Grace's eyes were fixed on the speaker's face, and Bob was cramming his pipe with fresh tobacco.

"Why! What happened?" asked his wife.

Tobias turned towards her as he answered:

"He had his foot over the cliff as he turned to the left, and a g'eat flash o' lightning come that second, and he saw that it were just i' time. He told me he stood like that, wi' his foot in the air, for long enough, for all the power had gone out of his limbs. Flash after flash came, and still he could not move. He said he felt bound to stay there and watch, same as if he was bewitched."

"Why! What did he see?" asked Grace, in a low voice.

"Death in 'Hell's Mouth,'" said Tobias slowly. "He were just over it, and in less time than I take to tell it he would have been a dead man but for that flash of lightning."

"Enough to make a minister of him," said Bob roughly.

The woman said nothing, but folded her hands together over her knitting and looked into the fire. Tobias glanced at her as if expecting her to speak, but as she did not he went on. "No, it never took him a bit like that. He never seemed to think it was the hand of the Lord at all, but somethin' life-like in the lightning itself. Chaps used to

tease him often about it, for just as some go crazy wi' terror when a storm's brewin', he looked then for all the world as a man does when he's goin' to see his sweetheart."

The woman began knitting again as she said :

"I never heard of no such thing before."

"It's yarns, seems to me," said Bob.

"No, it ain't," said Tobias quietly. "It's gospel truth. Over everythin' else the man was as hard as nails, and had no soft feelin's for women nor childer, nor even cats and such like, but the lightning allus made a new man of him ; he'd sit alone with it for hours, never go nigh no one when a storm was on, and was for days after it was over a quiet, good-natured chap, ready to do a turn for anybody. Nobody could make it up, and no more can I," ended Tobias thoughtfully.

"Worse nor a woman's fancy, that," said Bob. "I can't abide whims and unbeknowns ideas o' that kind ; they allus make me sick."

"Perhaps it was unavoidable in him," said Grace. "What's strong in the heart must out some way."

Bob scratched his head with the stem of his pipe, which he rubbed between his finger and thumb, and began smoking again as he said :

"Grace is the sort as could get a whimey notion like that over lightning, and there'd be no puttin' it out of her head if she did," he said, as he jerked his thumb towards her.

There was a pause.

"Do the lightning fuss you at all, Mrs Olds?" asked Tobias gently.

The woman smiled as she answered :
"No, it do never make much difference to me one way nor another. I allus take what comes just as it comes, but," and she looked nervously towards her husband, "of course, I do allus feel it can cause sudden death at times, and though I know it is a quick and easy way of dyin'," she added softly, "still, I should not like to be unprepared, and so I allus puts clean pillow-slips on the bed when a storm comes for fear we should be took sudden in the night, for I should like to be found clean and tidy, however quick my end was."
Bob gazed into the fire and smoked harder than ever, and Tobias stopped smoking and looked at the woman as she ceased.

IDOLATRY

"Good morning, my dear," said Widow Trevaskis one December day when I went in to see how she was. "How do 'e find yoursel' i' this dark, cold weather after coming from foreign parts?"

"Pretty well, thank you," I said. "How are you?"

"Tolerable for me, my dear, but I feel the weight of a world sometimes i' the long evenin's and wi' no one to speak to."

I looked at her resigned, old face, and wondered how she managed to live at all, for added to her loneliness was a sorry lack of means. My thoughts were interrupted by the old woman pointing to a strange image in the dark corner of her kitchen, and saying:

"But for he, my dear, I sud 'ave been in the cemetery long ago."

I got up to examine the curious object she had pointed out. It was coal black and shone, as the old dame expressed it, "like a kitchen stove on a Saturday night." I could not imagine what it was for, though it was evidently supposed to resemble

a human being, the exaggerated lines of its face made me shudder, as at things eerie and satanic. Its huge, flat forehead and dilated nostrils made me feel anything but rested as I stood in its presence. Its large chest and uplifted hands awoke no enthusiasm in my heart, such as I saw in the eyes of Dame Trevaskis.

"Why does that comfort you?" I asked, as I pointed to the image.

The old dame rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair, and crossed her little hands on her clean apron as she looked up at the strange figure. A tender smile stole over her face.

"Lor!" she said, "he'm like a thing human to me. Look how he smiles upon me this minute, and maybe another time if you look up he do seem to frown, like a thing. I were fair scared of 'en onc'st, but that were afore he were black. Now I seems to understand."

"What colour was he before he was black?" I asked in surprise.

"Some heathen colour, my dear, as wasn't no proper colour at all, and wouldn't clean nohow. I polished 'en and scrubbed 'en and soaked 'en till you'd 'ave thought he'd be gone altogether, and not a bit o' difference could I make in 'en. I've never made use o' no swear-words i' my life afore, but I did over he, sure enough. I thought I should never get 'en into a decent Christian thing at all."

"What is it?" I asked curiously.

"Why, a little heathen god, my handsome. It is one as my eldest son brought 'ome just afore he

died, and he put 'en there," pointing to the corner, "and said as how he were bound to bring me luck. Dear fellow!" continued Widow Trevaskis, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, "he said to me: 'Take great care of he, mother, for he've a sight o' good and evil in him, and as you serve he he'll serve thee.' The dear soul winked and laughed as he spoke they words, but they were gospel truth, sure enough. When the dear lad were buried up, I turned to he like as if he was the only one as 'ad known my boy; but 'is colour worrited me some thing, and I seemed to see in the eyes of 'en a command for me to obey, and one I could not find out at all. It weren't no manner o' use speaking to Jane Ann, poor Matthew's wife, for she be too snappy i' the tongue to harken. Poor Matthey!" sighed Widow Trevaskis, "he'm a splendid man beatened into bitterness and silence. He never broke she in the first start off, and he'm good as doomed as far as peace be concerned."

Widow Trevaskis saw my eyes were fixed on the idol, and she folded her hands as she returned to the subject we had started when I first came in.

"Lor! my dear!" she said, "we'm forgetting he," pointing to the image. "Well, I said nothin' to no one, but one day, as I told 'e, I scrubbed 'en and soaked 'en and polished 'en, but he went more the colour of a corpse than ever, and I were fair scared of 'en. I got my little grand-chiel Harriet Jane to sleep here with me one night for deadly terror of the eyes of 'en. Whatever it were he wished me to do I could not make out at all, but I was

certain sure it had nothin' to do wi' soap and water, or brass paste and such like."

The old woman was gazing affectionately at the image before her as she continued :

"I don't wonder the heathen worship they little gods, for they'm wonderful knowin' i' all sorts o' ways. I believe they puts the things they wants carried into practice into our heads, else why should us suddenly know, like I did ? "

"What did you find out ? " I asked, amused at her talk.

"Look ! " she said suddenly. "Believe me or not, I were sittin' thinkin' o' my dead boy one night, and lookin' up at the image there like I belong, when all of a sudden it flashed over me that there could be nothin' i' England fit to polish such a thing as that, for I've heard my son say that the idols i' heathen lands shines like gold, and that people bow down and worship 'em, thousands at a time, for what they can do. I thought that night, my dear, till I'd a headache from it, but the idea must 'ave come straight from he," she went on, pointing solemnly towards the image, "for I took it into my head to blacklead 'en and make 'en shine that way instead of wi' gold. I sat up all night, and I polished 'en and rubbed 'en till my old back ached, and then I put 'en back on his stand again. The very features of 'en had changed ; he've somehow never ceased to smile on me, for apparently that was just the thing to please 'en, and so I polishes 'en up regular, same as I wind the clock and clean the grate, and he and me be

rare company o' nights. I seem to hear 'en telling me of all the gran' things my son did i' foreign parts." The old woman sighed as she looked into the fire, and a gentle smile was on her face as she said: "Him and me now have grown friends, and I very often forget he's a god at all since I've polished 'en up so, for I've got sort o' used to he and not a bit afraid of 'en. Time was when I used to look down on idols, but it seems to me they must be the salvation o' many cannibal dears, when they dare scarcely tell even their own kin the monstrous murders they belong to do at times." "I envy you, Mrs Trevaskis," I said, as I sighed and rose to go.

USELESS TOOLS

"Do you think it would be any use to speak to the police about the loss of my watch?" I said to Martha Hicks one morning. I had been distressed to find, on returning from my bathe, that my watch was not on its chain.

"Lor! speakin' to the police ain't no manner o' use," said Martha.

"Why?" I asked.

"They'm useless tools hereabouts," said Martha. "What they find out is not worth the asking most times, and what is worth while catching for chastisement, if they do happen on it, they 'ave to keep to theirselves for fear of what may befall them."

"Oh!" I said curiously, "surely it is their duty to report things to head-quarters."

Martha Hicks smiled as she carefully ironed an apron, and when it was folded she turned and faced me as she said:

"A lesson be allus a lesson if it's taught wi' pain enough, and even a p'liceman don't care to look death i' the face more than needs be."

"Death!" I ejaculated.

"Iss!" snapped Martha. "Either by fire or water or stones, or even worse, a body 'ave to pay the penalty if they interfere with we. We'm a people whose motto is 'One and all,' and we ain't going to let no neighbours be put upon or hurted in no ways, law or no law. Their very orders from uplong do make the police more like foreigners and strangers than those who do belong hereabouts. Even if a man be reared in the place, as soon as he claps that there uniform on, and his helmet and belt, he looks more like a dressed-up enemy than a man with a human heart inside him."

"Have the police not been in these parts very long?" I asked.

"No, my dear; some fifteen year or so, that's all," said Martha, as she pulled out a print dress from the basket for ironing. "Whoever first started the notion of police here I can't think," she continued, "but all of a sudden one of they arrived in uniform, and for a bit he was real welcome, as he kep' most of our children quiet follerin' him, and as it was the holidays it seemed a real stroke of good luck. But the pleasant part of it did not last long, for the g'eat chap got mopish findin' nothin' to do, and he a hearty feller too, and so he up and fines Matthew Trevaskis for lettin' his bullocks wander in a lane they'd been allowed to go in for years." Martha turned to the kitchen range and poked the fire fiercely as she went on: "Imperance, sure enough! we taught he, we did. We had no manner of use for creatures like that, who'd allus be hard upon we when they was lost

for a job. It's allus pitiable, to my mind, to see a man peerin' and pryin' to get a livin' out o' nothin', in a manner o' speakin', like writers and such queer creatures as a spade 'ud frighten for fear it spoke of good hard work." Martha went to the fire and got a new heater and put it in the ironing-box. As she held the iron near her cheek to test its heat she added: "We began to think he'd be running hens in for police practice next, so we thought we'd just settle him."

"How did you manage it?" I asked, for the woman's mouth was twitching with smiles as she bent over her work.

"Why! chastisement, of course!" said Martha, still smiling grimly. My puzzled look amused her.

"We ain't scared o' nobody in these parts—that is, as long as one neighbour will stand by another. When Lawyer Rodda's wife refused to let her nurse-girl out o' Sunday we talked it over, and three of our lot broke the winders of the house, and, though he were the law itself—Rodda, I mean—in a manner o' speakin', he never did a thing. He'd lived here too long to tempt we, and only his wife were an uplong. Next Sunday the maid were out dressed up and walking with her chap till ten o'clock."

"But how did you settle the policeman?" I asked.

"Lor! my dear," she said sharply, "we all—that is, most of the village—sat an hour and talked the thing out, and my brother-in-law, being six foot in

his stocking feet, were chosen to do the main part o' the job when next that useless tool began to play at law with the likes o' we. We hadn't to wait long, for one day he come after Jacob Pengilly's dog licences, and he told him he'd be had up for not taking a licence for his bobtail sheep-dog as he kept purposely for cattle. Jacob told 'en he'd never paid no Government for keepin' that dog, and he said, what was more, he never would. The bobby said he must, and he made notes in his little book. Jacob showed him the end of his boot, and told him, so my nephew said, to go to hell. 'Shain't go so far as that,' the bobby answered. 'Jacob,' he said, 'you'll hear more of this, my good man, before very long.' That were too much for Jacob. He gave the policeman a good shove out of the farmyard, and he were served aforelong wi' something about assault and battery. It woke murder i' Jacob's heart, and he sat thinking darkly night after night, instead of smokin' and jokin', as he do belong. He never told his women folkses, nor even me, nor no female in the parish what he were meditating."

"Wise man," I ventured to remark.

"Fool!" responded Martha. "A man's wisdom without a woman's wits to further it be a very washy, unconvincin' thing, and often enough leads to disaster."

"Did it in this case?" I asked.

"Iss! and no!" responded Martha. "Jacob and all the strongest youngsters in the place hunted that new-fangled bobby like they'd hunt a rat out of a

hole, and drove 'en down to the sea, and when they got 'en there they threw 'en in like a ball. He swam for his life, and he come up again by the quay swearin' some thing. They saw he were more dangerous than ever, so they dragged 'en to the end of the pier and threw 'en in again, knowing by then he could swim like a fish, and he did too. He swam over to the little river by Yane, and went to the police station dripping like a dog out of a pond. There was a fine talking and set to, and the youngsters were terrible scared, but the chap were a man as well as a bobby, and made things easy for Jacob and the rest."

"How could he do that?" I asked.

"He actually said it were mostly his fault for braggin' and hustlin' and pryin'," answered Martha. "Jacob Pengilly," she continued, "were so took back, for he expected a few months, that he sent 'en half a pig when he killed next, and I'm sure I'm thankful he didn't kill 'en that way," added Martha gravely, "for pork were out of season and swine fever were in most places."

"There seems little chance of my recovering my watch," I said dolefully.

"A big reward do allus go further wi' the likes o' we than police or the law," said Martha.

DOUBTS

"I FEEL very droopy," said Nancy Christopher to me one misty morning, as she stood in my doorway, with her white, tired face more drawn than usual.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Pain in the back, my dear, and water lodgin' round the 'eart."

"Poor you!" I said.

"Lordy! Lordy!" she whispered, "I'm a rare wicked woman, and it preys badly on my mind, it do."

"Why?" I asked, smiling. "I always look upon you as a very happy and good woman."

Nancy looked on the ground and walked slowly into my cottage.

"By your leave, my dear," she said, and sat down heavily on the stairs. Then she looked up at me and clasped her two old hands round one knee. "Sister be took bad again, and I'm"—here she stopped, unclasped her hands, and held them over her head as if in prayer—"I'm mazed to think on it. She's all my life, and if she be took it 'ud be

like the 'eart being cut out o' my poor old body. I've reared she, tended she, wintered and summered she sin' we were little childer together, and she's all I do want i' the world. The doctor says she's fair wore out, for her nerves is like a thing ruined, and I'm wastin' wi' terror at what has to be."

"It may not be as bad as that," I said.

"'Tis, my dear," she sobbed. Then, looking quickly up at me, she said bitterly: "I deserve it if she be took; that's the worst part of it all. When they told me she were to die, I up wi' my fist like this," and she raised her clenched hand to my face, "and I said to the doctor, 'Husht! I cain't and won't hear no such thing. Let some useless worm be took, but not she as is all my life,' and then I made use of a strange sayin' which is makin' me sad and trembly ever since I spoke it, for I were mazed wi' grief, and rebellious wi' terror, and I 'ardly 'ad time to collect my senses."

The old woman was rocking to and fro, and a great misery had made her eyes dull and tired. I touched her shoulder gently as I asked:

"What is it?"

"Oh!" she answered in a weary voice, "I up and said to the doctor, nearly strikin' of him as I stood before him, 'If she do leave me you'm worse nor a useless tool, and if there's a God above, which I can never disbelieve, He've a 'eart like a gaol door and not a heart o' love at all.' Oh!" she went on slowly, "how I ever come to harbour such a thought I cain't tell, for it were no sooner said than I knew it were not true, but," looking up piteously

to the ceiling, "if He heard it, my dear, surely He'll feel bound to chastise me for my soul's salvation, and so," sobbing bitterly, "both of we lone women 'ull be punished for the rash words of one of us, for my handsome won't be really happy in heaven without me to tend she. I do know that well enough. She've often said it do give her the crawls to be parted from me, even for an hour, and eternity cain't even be thought of without one another."

The old woman suddenly brightened, for she saw I was smiling.

"Cheer up," I said, "there is no real parting for a love like that."

"Are 'e quite sure, my dear?" she asked wistfully.

"Quite sure," I said.

"How do 'e know?" she almost whispered, and the eager look in her face had brought a little light into her tired eyes.

"I do know—that's all," I said sympathetically, and she nodded her head again and again as she smiled and whispered:

"Iss, iss, you speak out of conviction, my dear, as well as from book learnin', and I be comforted. I be very low in the body, and perhaps it do affect the mind. I'm up late and early tendin' she, and we neither of us dare speak of what's rendin' we in pieces. What do 'e think my handsome said to me this mornin'?"

"I don't know," I said.

"'Sister,' said my poor, weak dear, 'do 'e come close to my bed and tell me if it be really true that

the primroses be out i' the garden, and the daffies i' bud?' I told her there were a few just out. 'Then there's hope, sister,' she said, 'buds, buds, and the spring comin', think of it!' and she looked her old self at the thought of it. I put on my shoes and went forth and brought her in some primroses and violets, and we put them in a vase by her bed, and we sang a hymn of thanksgiving together, just as we did when we was children. And as I come up-long to see you, my dear, I kep' hoping the dear Lord would happen 'tend more to the loud singin' o' faith than to the wicked word I made use of in my great tribulation. I do allus forgive my handsome directly minute after she've crossed me, and it's likely He'll be more merciful to a poor human worm than I be to a sister, eh?" she asked anxiously.

I nodded, and she got up to go. As she clasped my hands she said:

"Buds be burstin', my dear, and 'ope is surely comin' back to poor old Nanny's heart."

MAKING AMENDS

"WELL, my dear! whatever can I do for 'e to make amends for all e've done for my poor mother? I sall never be able to repay 'e at all, I'm thinking."

I looked at the woman who stood before me, and smiled at her earnestness. She was the daughter of a dear old soul with whom I had spent many bright hours, for, though she was paralysed, she was the very spirit of patience and good humour.

"I want no thanks," I said; "what little I did for your dear mother was because I liked her."

"Ah, well!" answered Jane Hocking, with a fine upward turn of her head; "if I can't pay 'e in hake, my dear, I will in herrin', be sure of that; and the Lord will see to the rest. You'll never want, anyway; but above all any of we poor mortals can do for 'e you'll be abundantly blessed, I'm thinking."

She wiped a chair, and drew it to the fire, and we sat facing one another with our feet on the little fender. We stayed for some time enjoying the

warmth in silence, and then Jane Hocking spoke again.

"Mother was very nearey, my dear," she announced suddenly. "Do you know, when we come to look into her things a bit, we found quite a lot of sovereigns hid away in her bed-tye, sewn right in it, mind. Me and John George divided 'em up atween we and Ann Grace, and I can't tell 'e what a lot o' frettin' and naggin' it have spared we. Mother maybe meant the gold for her buryin', as she allus loved the thought of a hearse and bearers, but that was all done afore we found the money, and so, thanks be, it was too late to use it that way. Nothin', my dear, do make a man and woman so fretful and ugly as not havin' enough to go through with; it fair turns my blood to cabbage water to have to look at a sixpence and know I'm going to hustle and bustle it to do the work of a shillin'."

I laughed. "We all know that," I said, as I returned the woman's impressive nod.

"But there," Jane Hocking went on with a sigh, "I've got enough now to make my pillow easy to my head, and to let me walk with pride among my neighbours, and give them a smart of envy as they look upon me. It don't never do to tell folkses just what you've got; allus tell 'em a little more, in a manner of speakin', and throw in a word or two to make 'em guess more than you say—eh?" She smiled in a drowsy, contented sort of way as her eyes followed the flickering flames in the grate before her. She moved a saucepan to

one side, so that it should not boil over, and turned once more to me.

"A thought's just come to me," she said. "Do 'e by chance ever wear home-knitted stockings?"

"Yes, sometimes," I answered slowly, for I feared she was going to offer me the coarse pair her nimble fingers were making as she chatted to me.

"Well, I'll tell 'e what I'll do to make amends to 'e for bein' so kind to poor mother. I'll knit 'e a pair of nice, warm black stockings! There!"

She put down her work and folded her hands in her lap in a determined way.

"Thank you," I said, in rather a feeble voice; "it is very kind of you."

The bright eyes narrowed a little as she half-closed her lids and looked at me; then she bent forward and said very quickly, as she poked my knee with her forefinger:

"You buy the wool to-morrow, my dear, and I'll make 'em for 'e. Naw!"

Thanking her once more, I said good-bye, and promised to come the next day.

The wool was bought, and in less than a week the stockings were made.

"I've told 'e, my handsome, as I'd do anything for 'e any hour of the day or night; go through a furze-bush backwards if it came to that," said Jane Hocking, with fervour, as she presented me with the long, thick, black stockings, which I promised to wear, hoping, with a Jesuitical hypocrisy, that a way of deliverance would be found for me to escape

the hair-shirt type of penance. She seemed to detect a want of fervour in my thanks.

"Don't 'e like them, my dear?" she queried. The shrill note of interrogation in her question almost made me jump off my chair lest she had read my secret heart.

"Oh yes! very much; they are beautifully worked," I said emphatically.

I saw she was far from satisfied as her eye caught mine. I shuffled my feet and tried to smile. I grew more nervous still as she edged close up to me, as if she had detected the bland hypocrisy in my voice. I liked her, and would not willingly hurt her, and yet what was I to do? I held one long black stocking dangling from my hands, and tried to turn my eyes from hers, so that I could fasten them on her gift to me, and so tell a lie more easily; but her sharp eyes were riveted on mine, and the tension of the moment was getting more than I could bear. I knew I should soon laugh outright or drop the stocking and run. But she broke the silence.

"What," she said slowly, still keeping her eyes on mine, "what do 'e pay for knitting they long stockings you do wear?"

The tension was relieved, though I could not imagine why she asked me a question which seemed so far from the point at issue.

"Two shillings," I answered.

"Well!" she said, as she sidled quite close to me and winked solemnly into my wide-open eyes, "I'll only charge 'e, as it's you, half-a-crown for

this pair that I've knitted for 'e. Naw!" and the benevolence radiating from her face prevented any answer as I slowly drew my purse from my pocket.

MAGNETISM

"MARTHA, my dear, whatever 'ave happened to Bill?" said Nancy Curnow to her friend Martha Hicks one fine morning.

Martha knitted more quickly than ever as she answered:

"He'm a forth right fool, but he won't listen to reason. He's dead set on marryin' Harriet Jane Quick.'

"Whatever can 'e see in her at all?" queried Nancy, in a low voice.

"Somethin' as don't 'appen to come under the range of my eyeballs," snapped Martha.

"She'm pock-marked," said Nancy.

"Her's squint-eyed i' some lights," said Martha.

"And carroty hair," said Nancy.

"Splay feet too, like a thing," said Martha.

"A g'eat mouth like a young thrush i' the nest," said Nancy; "but, there, on the other hand, her don't make use of as much victual as you'd suppose by the look o' she."

"Company manners ain't nothing to judge by, for the uses o' daily life makes they soon go to pieces,"

said Martha. "Bill will need all he do earn to keep she."

"Whatever took him, I wonder, to choose she?" asked Nancy; "it ain't as if she'd money neither."

"Obstinacy," responded Martha.

"Lor!" said Nancy. "You don't say."

"Bill 'ave allus had rather a fancy for saucy women," said Martha, "but lately he've sobered a bit; but I never thought he'd turn all the other way like this. I couldn't believe he were making up to she, and I tormented he a lot and cried she down like a foolish, unlearnt woman i' these things. If you want a man to drop a female, you just praise her night and day; the abuse o' she be a patent for hitching him tight, I can tell 'e."

"But," said Nancy thoughtfully, with her head on one side, "no man marries a woman except to please hissel'. She must 'ave something in her to fetch him as we cain't see, for I reckon love is a rare thing for opening a man's eyes to see marvels."

"Hold thy noise, Nancy Curnow," said Martha sharply. "Whatever do you know about love?"

"By observation," said Nancy.

"By fiddlesticks!" said Martha. "You may as well say you know how to swim by looking at the sea."

Nancy bent her head, and a slight flush crept over her face as she said quietly:

"You allus know what belongs, my dear. I be a foolish woman to talk about things as I knaw nothin' about."

The door opened and a tall man came in. He

jerked his head and smiled at the two women as he drew his chair to the table.

"Have you fitted a cup o' tea, aunt?" he asked, looking at Martha.

"No, my son, we've been coseying and talking about thee," said Martha, with a glance at Nancy.

"About me?" he queried.

Nancy's gentle voice piped out somewhat nervously as she looked at the young man:

"Only hoping well for this marriage o' thine, Bill."

Martha planted the kettle on the fire with a shrug of her shoulders.

"There was no hopin' about it at all," she murmured; "we was wonderin'."

"Wonderin' what?" asked Bill.

"What 'ad taken thee in Harriet Jane Quick to make thee want to marry her," said Martha grimly.

Bill planted his elbows on the table and looked at the two women.

"Same as takes most chaps," he said.

"Stuff!" said Martha.

"Unlikely!" said Nancy.

"Fact!" said Bill.

"Beauty, I suppose?" queried Martha, with a sneer.

"No!" said Bill.

Nancy fixed her gentle eyes upon the man before her.

"Nice figure, eh, Bill?" she queried.

"Maybe!" said Bill.

"Not that even," said Martha, suddenly turning round and facing the two.

"No, not that I do knaw," said Bill, laughing. "I never even thought o' that till you put it in my head."

"Sharp tongue, perhaps?" asked Martha acidly.

"I don't cotton to that," said Bill slyly. "That 'ud go against she with me."

"Sakes!" said Nancy nervously, as she glanced towards Martha, "a sharp tongue be a grand stand-by for directin' of a house. A silent, sullen woman be often a sword i' the flesh, where a teasy one be only a thorn by comparison."

"Well spoken, Nancy Curnow," said Martha, as she poured the water into the teapot.

"I've never had no dealin's wi' sullen females," said Bill thoughtfully.

"Perhaps it be wealth 'as 'ave mazed 'e," said Nancy.

Bill hung his head as he muttered:

"I've never made so bold as to ask what she've laid by."

"She's too sly to let on," said Martha.

"She ain't no such thing," said Bill sharply.

"Hold thy noise," cried Martha. "I don't knaw the maid. I was merely wonderin' what had fetched 'e, that's all."

"Well!" said Bill, as he cut into a large piece of heavy cake and drank his tea, "I'll satisfy 'e for onc'st."

The two women leaned forward, glancing sideways at one another, and Martha put a piece of sugar in Bill's tea. There was a long pause, broken only by the sound of Bill's "supping" his tea, for hay-

making is "dry" work. As he rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand, he said quietly :

"I never made no observations about Harriet Jane's looks, nor yet her figure, nor such-like. As for her savin's, it's same as with her temper and general constitution ; they can all be studied by and by, when the bans 'ave been read and the weddin' day gone."

The two women shook their heads gravely as they looked at Bill, who went on rapidly :

"What 'ave drew me to she, and what 'ave fixed me into a longin' for matrimony is——"

There was a pause, and the two women bent eagerly forward, and Bill coughed as he snapped out with a short laugh :

"Well, a come-hither look in her eye which I couldn't withstand nohow."

MRS PENGILLY AT HOME

Jacob Pengilly sat by the kitchen-fire with his long legs stretched out to the blaze and his eyes riveted on the kettle, whose lid was jumping about with the spluttering water under it. His bucolic nerves were a little disturbed. He looked up irritably as the door opened.

"Lor! Jacob! you bean't smokin' nor nothin', my son. You don't belong to sit moody like this 'ere," said Mrs Pengilly.

Jacob turned slowly round and faced his mother, and his dull brain gradually realised she had changed in a few weeks. He scratched his head and still looked at her, for he was at a loss to understand things.

"You'm altered like a thing," he said jerkily. "You'm like a stranger woman i' some ways."

Mrs Pengilly sighed, and then she smiled as she said:

"Jacob, if anybody had told me that my milk-pans could ever become to my eyes almost as dear

as my own childer, I should have told 'em they was willing liars."

Jacob folded his arms and said :

"You'm mazy."

"I'm home," said Mrs Pengilly gently. "Nothin' else matters. I keep wanderin' round the house, almost swallowin' the very sunbeams as catch and kiss atween thy room and Charlotte's, and—and—" the woman looked at her son under her eyes—"if it hadn't been too silly I could 'ave fair hugged the white pillow on my own bed, for I feel as if I'd been away years and years."

Jacob looked moodily at the toe of his boot. "Fancies, I guess," he said slowly. "Women, they say, don't never like changes. They'm like cats—can't be drove from their own firesides."

"London be a bewilderin', dark, heart-rendin' place," said Mrs Pengilly.

Jacob grunted as he answered :

"It can't be so bad, or else so many folkses wouldn't live there."

"Lots o' folkses dwell in hell so far as numbers be concerned," said Mrs Pengilly solemnly.

Her son smiled, and his heavy mouth twitched. "I wonder," he said roughly, "if folkses ever tire of heaven. I'm beginning to 'ate the very sunlight and the barkin' o' the dogs and the birds singin', I want to see sights so badly. A circus do put me in a glow for days."

Mrs Pengilly sat down and folded her hands on her white apron. Suddenly her face cleared, and Jacob watched her with interest.

"Seen anythin'?" he said.

She wiped her eyes.

"Lor! I'm surely daft," she said. "A bit o' bramble and honeysuckle against the winder there made my heart flutter almost as it did when your father began courtin' of me. I feel I could do a kindness to a fair blackguard in thanksgiving for bein' here once after that dreadful time in London."

Jacob suddenly stood up.

"I've thought o' nothin' else for years," he said, "but of the day I should get to London town, and now you'm trying all you know how to cool me off. Why!" he added eagerly, "I never read no paper but I feel my heart beatin' against my ribs 'cause of all the things I know be goin' on there. None of my penny stories as I take in every week be in it for fightin' and bloodshed when you come to read what's going on daily and nightly in London."

Mrs Pengilly grew a little pale as she answered: "When you read about they things, Jacob, you never reckon wi' the sulphur smell in your nose and the sharp screams all around in your ears, nor the dirt in your eyes, and the jostling and shoving everywhere, and no proper light to see by. It all seems to choke you and make your back ache and your head split."

A large black cat had walked solemnly into the room and suddenly jumped on Mrs Pengilly's knee. She stroked it gently, and its purring was soon the only noise in the kitchen. Jacob frowned as he glanced at his mother and the cat.

"Silly noise," he said. "Allus the same—everything here allus the same."

"Thanks be," said his mother.

Jacob got down his gun and fingered the trigger.

"Shootin' be the only thing I like doin' now," he said.

"Lor!" said Mrs Pengilly, "I wonder why men folkses allus love to hurt."

"'Cause it's meant," said Jacob. As he spoke, a brown setter bounded into the room, and lashed her tail with delight against Jacob's legs. He patted her head, and she rushed towards the gun and smelt it. With a low cry of joy, she jumped in the air and tried to lick her master's hands, and from them she turned to the gun again.

"The only sensible female I do know," said Jacob, smiling. "We'll go and kill somethin', and we shall both feel better."

As Jacob turned towards the door, his mother called to him sharply.

"Jacob," she said, "the farm be payin' well, sure enough."

"Fairly, I reckon," said Jacob.

"Go to London," said Mrs Pengilly.

The man drew a long breath as he asked:

"What's come to thee?"

"Revelation," said his mother.

"Sakes!" said Jacob.

"It be borne in on me, my son, from my own wanderin's lately," and the woman looked hard at Jacob, "that the best way to learn your own mind is to follow it, and if you run after mazy, crazy

things, like a mad dog after its own tail, it's better so than to keep you back. You'll happen be humbler presently, and if you ain't—well, then, you'll be proud, and there's room enough in the world for both sorts."

"I'll go," said Jacob, "and to onc'st; and mind, make me a pasty as big as my head, and plenty of saffron buns and some cold tea and milk."

The woman smiled as she put the cat gently from her knee.

"I'll make them," she said, as her son strode out of the door, whistling; "but, thanks be, it need never fall to my lot to eat pasties, heavy cake, and saffron buns out of my own home, for they taste sodden and physicky in a strange land."

RESOLUTIONS

"ANOTHER year just on gone," said Martha Hicks to Nancy Curnow, "and the wind blaws without ceasin', and the days be dark and dreary, sure enough."

"This time o' year be allus unsettlin'," said Nancy, in a gentle voice. "After Christmas, when all the bustle and decoratin' be over, a body feels strange and lonesome, don't 'e think?"

Martha had taken her large black hat from the peg, and was looking into the crown. She shook her head and brought the hat over to Nancy, as she muttered:

"Wore out at last, I believe. It have wintered and summered me for many a year, but it'll scarce hold together now."

Nancy smiled into her friend's face as she said:

"It seems to belong to 'e, Martha, same as the mole on your cheek."

"It is like a friend, sure enough!" said Martha. "I've rooted up dahlias in it when summer were over, and I've weeded in it between the snowdrops and violets in the first sunny days. I've tended

and looked upon all the things in my garden in this 'ere hat, ever since mother died. I hate new-fangled things and folkses, and I'm only comfortable wi' the old-fashioned ways. New friends, as you knaw, Nancy Curnow, be brave and tryin' after old ones, and they be mostly thorns i' the flesh, and not much account for trustin' wi' nothin' you want to keep to yourself."

"They means well, I'm thinkin'," said Nancy; "but things is changin', and folkses jerk and jump about more nor they used to do, and there's no time for neighbourin' and coseyin' like there was once."

Martha tossed her head as she said:

"There's time enough for scatterin' abroad all the misplaced talk i' the parish, I'm thinking. I've taken a resolve to start the New Year wi'——" she added, as she hung up her hat with a sigh.

"Oh!" said Nancy; "what, then?"

"If you're a sensible female, you'll do the same," said Martha; "that is, if you values peace and quietness."

Nancy folded her hands, and looked at her friend. Martha poked the fire, and snapped out:

"I'm goin' to turn the other cheek if I'm buffeted on one, and if a neighbour hits that one, I shan't be sparey in givin' back; but I'll let them have a bit of a chance."

"Shall I make you a cup o' tea?" asked Nancy, with a smile. "Somethin' 'ave upset you. What can it be?"

"Sakes!" cried Martha. "Cain't a body lean

a bit to a parson's way, without a companion taking it for a jeer? We're taught not to return evil wi' evil, though a hard answer, if too much is laid on anybody, can't count as a hit back. Natural defence, of course, be a virtue, and I mean allus to justify myself whenever I'm tormented."

"But that's no new thing," said Nancy, smiling into Martha's face. "Thee've never been ready wi' soft answers, my dear."

"That's all you do knaw, Nancy Curnow," said Martha briskly; "but I've found somethin' out in my older years."

"What?" asked Nancy.

"To hold my tongue and let other people wag theirs. That's the sure way to make friends and to keep them, too."

"Lor!" said Nancy, "and you do love to——"

"Hold your noise!" said Martha sharply. "I'm off gossip, for it do graw like ferns i' the lewth, and you never knaw the end of it. It be worse nor knives and guns for killin' anybody in a manner of speaking, and then it's not fair no way, for a person can't fight for theirselves behind their own back."

"Martha Hicks, my dear, be you feelin' ill?" asked Nancy anxiously.

Martha coughed as she snapped back:

"Do 'e allus credit a good resolution that way, Nancy Curnow?"

"But it's all unnatural," said Nancy solemnly. "It seems like a token to hear you talk like that."

"I don't suppose I'm good enough to die yet," said

Martha shortly, "but I've been thinkin' a lot lately, and the New Year do make a body begin all over again. Of course, I may be more eager for a slander in a day or two just from keepin' back a little, but I'm beginning to understand now why things go awry i' this village."

"Why?" asked Nancy.

"'Cause we'm taken up wi' frettin' over any bit o' prosperity or good luck we see about us instead of spending our time in bein' comfortable and happy ourselves. My dear woman, it 'ave come over me like a dream that it's breaking a commandment to grudge a bit of luck to a neighbour or to steal their good name for pastime. It's somethin' to think on, I can tell you, for it stops jawin' when you've hopped on the truth that a body can't even tell a lie by theirselves, for it needs the person as listens to back it up by understandin' of it, and so there's two culpabable instead of one."

Nancy Curnow got up from her chair, and took a little box from the shelf, opened the lid in silence and shook her head. Martha laughed as she watched her.

"It ain't pills I do want, Nancy, my dear," she said. "I finished the box only last night, and the 'painkiller' be there, too, if I need it. It's a real light I've got, I tell thee, and there's nothin' like being convicted over some things."

The door opened, and a stout, red-faced woman peered in.

"Lor!" cried Nancy. "Whatever 'ave took Sarah Friggens?"

Martha looked frowningly at the new-comer as she stood in the doorway.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Sarah breathlessly. "That varmint up there," jerking her fingers towards the road, "'ave shown her colours at last." Here Sarah blew her nose noisily on the corner of her apron. "She've been found out, sure enough, and——"

"Come in, do," said Martha briskly, as she poked the fire and drew a chair towards it for Sarah. Then she murmured: "The weather or somethin' 'ave given me the fair hump, and the very sight of a neighbour wi' a bit of news be most cheerin'. Sit down and begin to onc'st."

Nancy coughed nervously as she whispered to Sarah:

"Don't tell it if it be against the woman. It won't do no good, and Martha can't abear it. It do give her qualms now to hear measly tales about neighbours."

Sarah Friggens looked at Martha Hicks, and the two women laughed outright.

"Fit a cup o' tea, and make it strong," said Martha, and her back was turned to Nancy as she gave the order.

"'To let,' do look cold and bare, like a thing," said Mrs Pengilly, as she pointed to a large white card in my front window. I turned to my boxes and cases standing in a row in the passage, and said:

"I wonder if I shall ever want to come back again?"

"Iss! my dear," responded Mrs Pengilly. "Just because you've had to battle so freely wi' elements and nuisances of all sorts, your heart'll turn back to the old place again. It's only what a body 'ave suffered over what draws 'en, in rages of longing, like a thing they can never forget seemly. You've been one here against all, in a manner of speaking, for it do take years with we to treat a stranger like one of our own. We've been reared to look on all uplongs as natural foes, and though we all likes you, my dear, still it 'ave been a matter of principle wi' some, and wishing you no harm neither, just to show they could frustrate you in any undertaking. It's not malice, mind you, any more than wrestlin' or that sort."

I sighed.

"Don't 'e take it to heart," said Mrs Pengilly. "There's natural and unnatural enemies, and I don't believe you'll leave behind a single one of they last. Neighbours do commend 'e right and left, and I heard Matthew Trevaskis say the other day that you was the all roundest woman he'd ever met."

Jacob Pengilly drove up to the door and shouted cheerily :

"Be your boxes ready? I'm going to give you the last send off, and I hope the heartiness of it'll make you change your mind one day and come back along o' we again."

"Perhaps," I said, and I smiled as the boxes were lifted into the cart.

"She'm real relieved to be going, mother," said Jacob. "The place 'ave weighed on she like London town on you. What's prime bullock's beef to one be wormwood to another. We'll send you cream and pilchards to mind you of we. They'll happen taste sweet in your tooth with all the smoke and noise up there," and he flicked his whip towards the road.

"Thank you," I said, as Jacob turned his horse's head towards the station. As Mrs Pengilly and I sauntered after the cart, she said to me in a choked voice :

"It be leery work sayin' good-bye to you, my handsome. I shall miss 'e, some thing."

As she spoke, Tobias Penberthy appeared in the turning of a lane, and his face beamed as he said :

"Lor! I were most afraid you'd be gone without a chan'st of saying good-bye to you."

"There's the whistle of the train leaving the junction," said Mrs Pengilly shortly. "We're just nigh the station, thanks be, but there's no time for no tonguing, Tobias."

Tobias hung his head and took the hand I held out to him as he muttered:

"Well—time or no time, I'm bound to tell you, missis, as I'm droopey at the thought of you going, for I'd allus hoped, if I'd outlived you, which God forbid, that I should 'ave had the good luck to be a bearer at your funeral. If any neighbour had asked me where I were speedin' to all dressed in black, I should have told him to mind his own business, and I'd 'ave helped carry you to your grave with all the goodwill in the world."

"Thank you," I said heartily, as we ran towards the station, "I shall always bear your goodwill in remembrance."

At the station Kezia Pengilly, with her baby in her arms, ran forward to say good-bye, and on the platform Martha Hicks, in her flat black hat and a long silk pelisse, edged with fringe, awaited us.

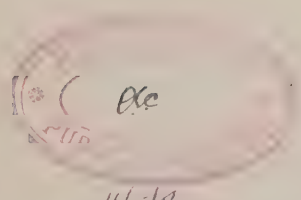
"Sakes!" said Martha. "You be running away like a thing, and you look whisht over it too. Strong air, like we do have here i' the early spring, be often times too much for feeble constitootions, but I wish you well all the same, and I shall miss you dropping in at times, for I be most like a barnacle wi' stayin' in the house so much."

As the train slowed into the little station, Kezia held her baby up for me to kiss it.

"She be named after you, mind," said Kezia, "and in a way it 'ave made up for her not being a boy, for Joe and me had reckoned on a son."

"Lor!" said Mrs Pengilly, as she pushed me into the carriage, "don't go for to overcome the woman afore a long journey. She's nigh weepin' now, for she be most like a real neighbour after all."

I looked through dim eyes at the little group waving and gesticulating on the platform as the train began to move. Just as we curved into the tunnel, I saw Tobias Penberthy leaning over the wall above the station. His head was in his hands, and a forlorn hope was depicted in his anxious face. We had entered the tunnel, and I had lost sight of all my neighbours.



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